The Journal Gazette
Saturday, October 17, 2026



2026 ELECTION ✓GUIDE

A roundup of what will appear on ballots
in 11 northeast Indiana counties and previews
of nearly 20 races ahead of Election Day on Nov. 3

STATEWIDE

VOTE FOR ALL OF THESE CANDIDATES



Beau Bayh
Secretary of State



Coumba Kebe
State Treasurer



Jessica Bailey
State Comptroller

VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE IN YOUR DISTRICT

STATE SENATE



Blaine Sefton
State Senate
District 14



Julie McGill
State Senate
District 15



Timothy Murphy
State Senate
District 19

STATE HOUSE

VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE IN YOUR DISTRICT



Phil GiaQuinta
State House
District 80



Sharon Wight
State House
District 81



Kyle Miller
State House
District 82



Wesley Haffenden
State House
District 83



Misti Meehan
State House
District 84



Mark Wehrle
State House
District 85

ALLEN COUNTY

VOTE FOR ALL OF THESE CANDIDATES



Keri Roby
Allen County
Circuit Court Clerk



Nikole Gillum
Allen County Auditor



Cheyenne Stoppenhagen
Allen County Recorder



Kate Conner
County Commissioner
District 2



Jorge Fernandez
County Commissioner
District 3

VOTE EARLY

VOTE BLUE

Allen County
DEMOCRATIC PARTY

COUNTY COUNCIL

VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE IN YOUR DISTRICT



Melissa Fisher
County Council
District 1



Stacey Freeman
County Council
District 3



Lee Castillo
County Council
District 4

allencountydemocrats.org



File

Early voting is open now at select locations. Election Day is Nov. 3.

A look at what's inside

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

Welcome to The Journal Gazette's 2026 Election Guide. We hope you will find this edition useful while preparing to cast your vote in northeast Indiana.

This guide includes previews for 19 contested races in Allen County. We asked those candidates through regular mail and email to complete questionnaires and compiled their responses. Some candidates did not respond.

You will also find ballots for 11 northeast Indiana counties. Township races are not included but can be found at IndianaVoters.com.

Additional coverage can be found at www.journalgazette.net/elections where results will be posted after voting closes Nov. 3.

If you would like to share an opinion about candidates or other election matters, Letters to the Editor can be emailed to letters@jg.net. Include your name, address and phone number for verification. Writers are limited to one letter every 30 days. Letters about the election must be received by noon Oct. 26.

Political advertising in this section did not affect content.

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NEWSLETTERS

Want continuing coverage of what is going on in local government and more? Get headlines in your inbox with The Journal Gazette's free email newsletters. Go to www.journalgazette.net/newsletter to select Government & Politics from among our 13 newsletters.

Leading with Empathy

SHARON WIGHT FOR INDIANA HOUSE



Dedicated to serving the people of Indiana, Sharon is committed to transparency, integrity, and progress. With a strong focus on education, healthcare, and economic growth, Sharon aims to create a better future for all. Learn about the issues that matter and join us in building a brighter tomorrow.

Sharon Wight for District 81

An Allen County registered voter can choose from the list of Vote Centers and cast your ballot at any location on Election Day between the hours of 6:00 AM and 6:00 PM.
(Source: https://www.allencounty.in.gov/938/Election-Day-Vote-Centers)

Paid for by Friends of Sharon Wight

SOUTHEAST ALLEN COUNTY

County Council District 1

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

A retiree and a local business owner are vying for voters' support to represent the Allen County Council's southeast district.

Republican Mike Clendenen and Democrat Melissa Fisher are campaigning for the seat on the county's fiscal body. The seven-member County Council is responsible for setting the county's tax levy, establish the annual budget and act on funding requests.

Both candidates have pursued County Council before now.

Clendenen sought the position after Josh Hale resigned from the council's District 1 seat. Kyle Kerley, who previously served on the council until he lost in the 2024 election, won the Republican caucus in January.

In the primary for the Republican nomination, Clendenen defeated Kerley and Bryan Bohnke with more than half of the votes.

Fisher previously ran for Allen County Council at large in 2020. She is the co-owner of New Wave Wellness and an associate pastor at Aldersgate United Methodist Church.

Fisher was unopposed in the Democratic primary.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

If elected to this position, what are your primary goals?

CLENDENEN: If elected to the Allen County Council, my top long-term goals would focus on sustainable growth, fiscal responsibility, and community well-being.

CANDIDATES

Mike Clendenen

Age (as of Nov. 3): 71
Home: New Haven
Occupation: Retired
Political experience: First-time general election candidate



Clendenen

Melissa Fisher

Age (as of Nov. 3): 41
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Co-owner of New Wave Wellness and associate pastor at Aldersgate United Methodist Church
Political experience: Ran for County Council at large in 2020



Fisher

First, I aim to promote responsible economic development by attracting quality jobs, supporting local businesses, and ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with growth. This includes investing in roads, broadband access, and workforce development to strengthen the county's competitiveness.

Second, I will prioritize transparent and accountable budgeting. Taxpayer dollars should be used efficiently, with clear communication about where funds are allocated and why.

Finally, I am committed to enhancing quality of life for all residents. This means supporting public safety, expanding access to parks and community resources, and encouraging initiatives that improve public health and neighborhood vitality.

Together, these goals will help build a stronger, more resilient Allen County for future generations.

FISHER: My primary goal is to ensure Allen County's budget reflects the real needs of the people it serves. I will prioritize responsible fiscal oversight, greater transparency in county spending, and balanced representation on the council.

I also want to strengthen access to mental health and addiction services by investing in proactive, community-based support before individuals and families reach a crisis. Public safety, infrastructure, and essential county services must remain adequately funded while taxpayers' dollars are carefully protected.

I will listen to residents, ask difficult questions, and evaluate spending based on measurable results. District 1 deserves a council member who is accessible, accountable, and willing to work across party lines. Red and blue make purple – we must come together to move Allen County forward.

The county has a cash balance of more than $40 million. Do you think that balance should be maintained or that officials should spend that balance down during the next budget season?

CLENDENEN: For a conservative Allen County candidate, I would avoid framing it as "keep $40 million" versus "spend $40 million." The stronger answer is that the county should maintain a prudent reserve, but taxpayers shouldn't be sitting on excessive cash indefinitely if there are legitimate one-time needs or opportunities to reduce future costs.

I don't think the answer is simply to spend the money because it's there, and I don't think the answer is to keep every dollar sitting in an account indefinitely.

Allen County's cash balance of more than $40 million provides financial stability. We should maintain a responsible reserve for emergencies, economic downturns, and unexpected expenses. As a conservative, I believe in planning ahead rather than spending today's funds on the assumption that future revenue is guaranteed.

At the same time, if we determine that the county is holding more cash than it reasonably needs, I would rather see those dollars put to work on legitimate one-time needs – such as infrastructure, equipment, or projects that reduce future operating costs – than create new recurring spending.

Fisher: Allen County should maintain a responsible reserve, but holding more than $40 million requires a clear public explanation of how much is necessary and why. County government should not spend down the balance simply because the money is available, nor should it accumulate taxpayer dollars without addressing urgent needs.

I support establishing a transparent reserve policy based on operating expenses, emergencies, future obligations, and economic uncertainty. Any funds above that responsible threshold should be considered for strategic, one-time investments – not ongoing expenses the county may be unable to sustain.

Priorities could include infrastructure, public safety, mental-health and addiction services, and projects that reduce future costs. Every expenditure should be publicly discussed, carefully reviewed, and tied to measurable outcomes. Fiscal responsibility means preparing for tomorrow while responsibly addressing the needs residents face today.

What do you see as the biggest issues the Allen County Council currently faces?

CLENDENEN: I believe the biggest issue facing the County Council is making sure Allen County can continue to grow and provide the services our residents expect without allowing government spending to grow faster than the taxpayers' ability to support it.

Allen County is fortunate to be growing, and I want to see that continue. But growth comes with increased demands for roads, infrastructure, public safety, and other county services.

The challenge for the County Council is setting the right priorities. We need to make sure we are funding the things that are truly essential, looking for efficiencies and savings wherever possible, and being very careful about creating new ongoing expenses.

As a conservative, I believe we should plan for the future, live within our means, and treat every taxpayer dollar as if it were our own.

If elected, that's the responsibility I would take very seriously.

FISHER: The council's greatest challenge is balancing rapid growth and increasing service demands with responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

Allen County must maintain infrastructure, support public safety, address

District 1, Page 5

NORTHWEST ALLEN COUNTY

County Council District 3

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

A newcomer faces a candidate who hopes to return to the county's fiscal body in the race for Allen County Council's northwest seat.

Democrat Stacey Freeman, an elementary special educator, and Republican Eric Tippmann, who works in science and technology development, are campaigning for the District 3 seat.

The successful candidate will replace Councilman Paul Lagemann, who was defeated by Tippmann in the Republican primary.

Freeman was unopposed in the primary.

The seven-member County Council is responsible for setting the county's tax levy, establish the annual budget and act on funding requests.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

If elected to this position, what are your primary goals?

FREEMAN: My primary goals are to help shape programs to benefit the public, more affordable housing, Protecting ALL members of our community as equals, and legalization of marijuana/cannabis.

TIPPMANN: My goals revolve around challenging the assumption that taxes must always rise and restore trust through responsible budgeting. Growth, not tax rate hikes, should help fund services while limiting the burden on existing residents.

We must eliminate unnecessary spending and exhaust alternatives before considering tax increases. Any proposed tax increase should come with a clear public explanation of why it is necessary and what alternatives have been exhausted. Success should be measured by the taxpayer's tax rate.

The county has a cash balance of more than $40 million. Do you think that balance should be maintained or that officials should spend that balance down during the next budget season?

FREEMAN: I believe the balance should be maintained.

Tippmann: The balance should be maintained. Cash is king, as the saying goes.

State tax policy (as well as federal spending) can change drastically from one legislative session to the next, affecting the revenue counties depend on. A healthy reserve gives Allen County time to adjust while maintaining essential services and avoiding rushed tax rate increases or borrowing costs.

What do you see as the biggest issues Allen County Council currently faces?

FREEMAN: The biggest issues I am concerned about is the homeless population and low wages.

TIPPMANN: Residents should be able to grow old in their homes without being taxed out of them. Large tax increases- through increased assessments as well as increased tax rates, have created financial pressure on many, especially the elderly, who have lived in and paid taxes on the same home for decades. I want to work with other elected officials in ways that will allow people to age in place.

CANDIDATES

Stacey Freeman



Freeman

Age (as of Nov. 3): 53
Home: Arcola
Occupation: Elementary special education
Political experience: First-time candidate

Eric Tippmann



Tippmann

Age (as of the May 5 election): 54
Home: Allen County
Occupation: Scientist and technology development professional
Political experience: Former Allen County Council at-large and Perry Township Trustee

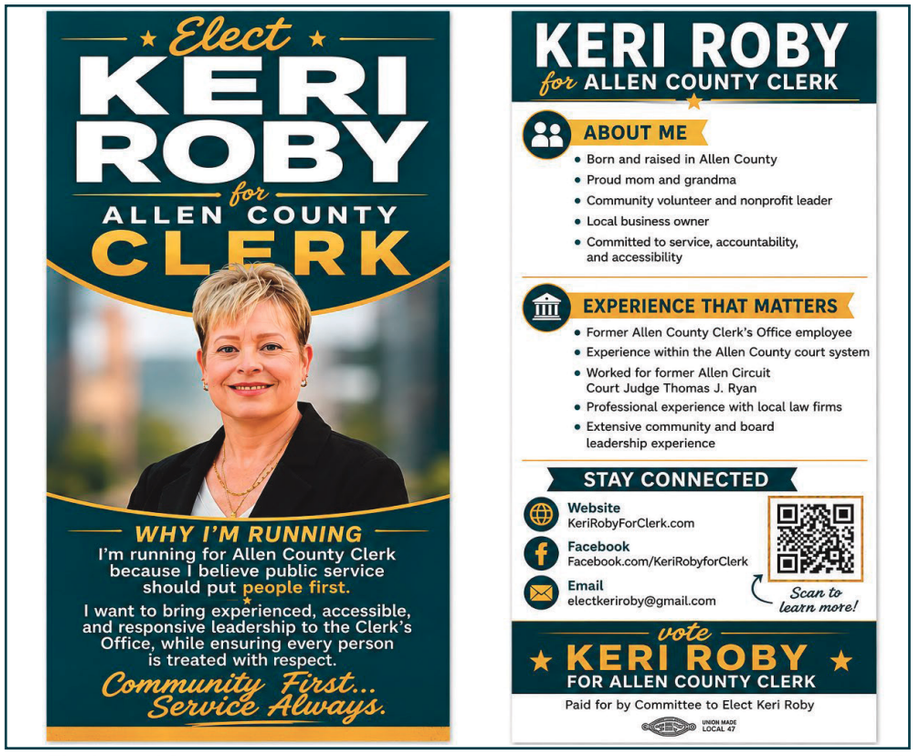
DISTRICT 1

Continued from Page 4

mental-health and addiction needs, and recruit and retain qualified employees without placing unnecessary burdens on residents. The council must also ensure that economic-development decisions benefit the entire county – not only a select few – and that tax abatements and incentives produce measurable public value.

Transparency is essential. Residents deserve understandable budgets, clear explanations of major expenditures, and meaningful opportunities to participate before decisions are finalized.

The council must look beyond short-term fixes and invest in prevention, collaboration, and long-term planning. Strong leadership will require careful oversight, openness to different perspectives, and a willingness to work across political lines for the good of every Allen County community.



SOTHWEST ALLEN COUNTY

County Council District 4

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

A first-time candidate is challenging an Allen County Council member to represent the southwest district on the county's fiscal board.

Councilman Don Wyss, a Republican, and Democrat Lee Castillo are campaigning for the seat. Wyss is at the end of his first term representing District 4.

Both were unopposed in the primary.

The seven-member County Council is responsible for setting the county's tax levy, establish the annual budget and act on funding requests.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

If elected to this position, what are your primary goals?

CASTILLO: My primary goal is to ensure county government uses taxpayer money responsibly and improves the lives of the people in our county.

I will protect essential services like public safety, courts, and other basic county responsibilities while preparing for future budget challenges. I also want greater examination of major spending decisions and economic development incentives so taxpayers can clearly see what they are getting in return.

Most importantly, I want working people to have a real voice in those decisions. Whether we are discussing employee pay, economic development, public safety, or new technology, I want the County Council to consider how those decisions affect the people who live and work here, not just the largest property owners.

WYSS: Calculated and sensible development amid a growing county will continue to be key. My primary goals will focus on managing growth in a fiscally responsible way while at the same time maintaining public safety. As Allen County continues to experience significant growth with more people and more jobs, County Council will need to be remain prudent as the fiscal body to determine when to allocate additional funds to departments that are working hard to handle this growth and oversee public safety. However, funds are not the only answer.

Having conversations about how to be more strategic with implementing technology and better practice to be more productive and efficient with the same resources will also be an important aspect. As a lifetime member of southwest Allen County, I have a passion for our community. I enjoy having these conversations and hearing different perspectives. This approach has helped me in my assessment of key decisions over the past four years for our area of the county that has a wonderful mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas.

The county has a cash balance of more than $40 million. Do you think that balance should be maintained or that officials should spend that balance down during the next budget season?

CASTILLO: I believe the county should maintain a healthy cash balance, but tax money should work for the people who provided it.

A reserve gives the county flexibility to handle emergencies, unexpected costs, and temporary revenue shortfalls without immediately raising taxes or cutting services. At the same time, we should not build reserves simply to accumulate money.

During the budget process, we should determine what level of reserves is healthy and ensure the rest of the county's resources are used responsibly to provide needed services.

WYSS: I would not support spending the balance down completely during the next budget season but would always be open to sensible uses of these dollars. We have yet to experience the full effect of Indiana Senate Enrolled Act 1 (SEA1) and how it will impact us at the local county level. Multiple agencies do predict that it will create fiscal challenges and funding shortfalls for local governments in the years ahead.

We need to plan for this uncertainty so we do not face potential service cuts in key departments that provide us with public safety and quality of life. With Allen County growing and departments already being strained in current budgets, it is likely that they will have additional funding needs during the upcoming years while at the same time local funding is reduced due to SEA1. We are positioned well to handle these impending headwinds with common sense and a level head.

What do you see as the biggest issues Allen County Council currently faces?

CASTILLO: SEA 1 will put real pressure on Allen County's budget. My first priority is to meet our existing obligations and protect public safety and essential services. Cutting staff just to replace those hours with overtime and turnover does not save money. We can use reserves for temporary shortfalls, but not to permanently fund recurring costs. Long term, we need to grow the tax base and be more discerning about abatements. Income tax increase on average wage earners should be the last resort. I would only support an increase after we have shown the shortfall, found reasonable savings, protected core services, and shown it is needed to replace revenue lost because of SEA1.

WYSS: We on County Council will be tasked with working in the upcoming years alongside the newly formed Allen County Consolidated Fire and Emergency Medical Services District leadership to discuss funding as well as strategize together on the intermediate and long-term plans in the priority areas of personnel, equipment, and projects.

As a lifetime resident of Allen County, I realize that we have had a long history of heroes that have served the county as volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel. Over time, our volunteer numbers declined as training standards and expectations increased over the years. These factors, as well as the overall cost increases of fire and EMS equipment, have led to the creation of the Allen County Consolidated Fire and EMS District, the first countywide district in the state.

As this new chapter begins, there will be new representatives in the Allen County Commissioners office and in Allen County Council. I will be ready to emphasize the need for cost savings and efficiencies as we work together to keep taxpayer money in front of mind.

CANDIDATES

Lee Castillo



Castillo

Age (as of Nov. 3): 39
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Assistant program manager for city of Fort Wayne
Political experience: First-time candidate

Don Wyss



Wyss

Age (as of Nov. 3): 51
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Farmer/ag business
Political experience: First elected to County Council in 2022.

Allen County **Auditor**

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

The Allen County auditor faces a newcomer in the election to serve as the chief financial officer.

Democrat Nikole Gillum, a sales manager, is challenging Republican Jacquelynn Scheuman, who has been auditor for a little more than a year.

Duties of the auditor's office include handling receipts and disbursements of county funds and completing annual reports for the Indiana State Board of Accounts, according to the county website. The office also manages payroll for county employees.

The auditor serves as Allen County Council's secretary and walks members through the annual budget process.

Scheuman was elected by a caucus after Nick Jordan, now the city of Fort Wayne's deputy controller, left the office. This will be her first time running for a general election.

Gillum and Scheuman were both unopposed in the primary election.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

What do you believe is the most important function or duty of the county auditor?

GILLUM: The most important function of the County Auditor is to manage county funds, handling all receipts and disbursements with the transparency and integrity that the role dictates.

SCHEUMAN: The most important function of the county auditor is safeguarding taxpayer dollars.

Our finance division oversees all financial processes for Allen County Government as a whole. The finance division handles everything from daily bill payment and payroll to financial statement compilation and the county budget process. We are the final check ensuring every County expense is legal, appropriate, and a responsible use of public funds.

Our property tax division keeps all property records up to date by transferring ownership, drawing property boundaries and calculating property tax bills. We then calculate the net assessed value of all property, which local units of government use during the budget process to set their tax rates.

A mistake here impacts every resident of Allen County – affecting everyone as either a property owner or a recipient of public services.

What is one way you would work to improve the office?

GILLUM: I would work to improve the County Auditor's office by modernizing digital access, making the office more accessible to residents by bringing it into the modern age.

SCHEUMAN: We are currently upgrading the drawing tools within our Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping system. This critical tool is utilized by our team to maintain the GIS mapping system used both internally and by external partners. For instance, when a large tract of land is sold to a developer, we establish the new boundaries, create the subdivided lots and assign the new parcel numbers. Finalizing this upgrade is critical to keeping our parcel mapping functional.

Along with this project, we also need to update our online deed process. Attorneys and title companies use the online submission system to electronically file property transfer deeds, which still follow the standard county review process through the Assessor, Auditor, and Recorder. This can be 100 or more filings a day. While the public-facing system functions well, our internal processing remains cumbersome. We are in the early stages of exploring digital solutions to streamline our online filing approvals.

As Allen County's economy grows, the efficiency and effectiveness of these processes become critical to its success.

If elected, what are your primary goals?

GILLUM: My primary goals are to increase the clarity and accountability of the office by providing clear breakdowns of how budgets are calculated and distributed across Allen County.

I also aim to upgrade online portals so citizens can easily find property tax deductions and submit files digitally, thereby reducing in-person visits and paper shuffling between offices to save valuable time and resources.

Overall, I will serve Allen County by safeguarding public funds, modernizing outdated processes, and ensuring financial transparency and fiscal responsibility. I aim to provide honesty to our community, ensuring our local government reflects what is truly important through principled leadership.

SCHEUMAN: Our office impacts every resident of Allen County, either as a property owner or a recipient of public services. As a lifelong Allen County resident and CPA, I bring 34 years of dedicated experience to the Auditor's office, where I lead a highly tenured staff. My goal as Auditor is to ensure our senior staff's vital knowledge and skills are successfully passed to the next generation.

Allen County faces significant upcoming changes to its property and income taxes due to new legislation. Implementing these changes within our property tax system will require the full collective expertise of our team. Determining the new Allen County income tax rates will require thorough analysis and forecasting to provide County Council with up-to-date data needed to ensure informed decision-making for Allen County residents.

CANDIDATES

Nikole Gillum



Gillum

Age (as of Nov. 3): 54
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: National sales manager
Political Experience: First-time candidate

Jackie Scheuman



Scheuman

Age (as of Nov. 3): 58
Home: Northwest Allen County
Occupation: Allen County Auditor, CPA
Political Experience: First-time candidate; elected by caucus as auditor last year

Allen County **Clerk of Courts**

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

Two first-time candidates are seeking the top position in the clerk's office for Allen Superior and Circuit courts.

Republican Toshua Manuel and Democrat Keri Roby are running for the office in the upcoming election.

Manuel currently serves as the chief deputy clerk of courts. Roby, now a business owner, said she previously work in the office for the late Judge Thomas Ryan.

The clerk is responsible for managing a staff of more than 50, processing more than $107 million annually and assisting local courts with more than 60,000 new cases each year, according to the office's website.

The clerk is also the only elected official to serve on the Allen County Election Board. The board has three members: the clerk and one appointee each from the local Republican and Democratic parties.

Manuel and Roby were both unopposed in the primary for their respective parties' nominations.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

This office focuses on processing thousands of court cases each year, along with millions of dollars in financial transactions. If elected, do you plan on improving this process? Why or why not?

MANUEL: As the current Chief Deputy Clerk, I've played a key role in many of our county's improvements in the judiciary. I have focused on ensuring resources are used wisely without compromising the quality of service provided. I will continue to work closely with the Indiana Supreme Court on initiatives to enhance customer service with our recently implemented language translating devices and emerging technology to improve case processing.

Processing thousands of cases and managing millions of dollars in financial transactions each year requires accuracy, accountability, and responsible use of resources. Our award-winning Clerk's office has demonstrated its commitment to those standards while providing outstanding service to the public. Our work and expertise have become a resource for Clerks across Indiana, who continually seek our advice for best practices.

Improvement is an ongoing process. Even when a system works well, we should continue asking if it can be done more efficiently or effectively. I will continue to build on the strong processes already in place while consistently reviewing our operations for opportunities to improve efficiency, accuracy and service.

ROBY: Absolutely. Any office responsible for processing thousands of court cases and managing millions of dollars should continually look for ways to improve accuracy, efficiency, and accountability.

Having worked in the Allen County Clerk's Office, for Judge Thomas Ryan, and in local law firms, I understand the importance of getting things right. A mistake or unnecessary delay can have a significant impact on someone's life.

My first step would be to evaluate existing procedures, listen to employees who handle these responsibilities daily, and identify opportunities for improvement. I would prioritize cross-training, responsible use of technology, strong financial oversight, and making sure employees have the resources they need to succeed.

Improvement doesn't always mean reinventing the wheel. Sometimes it means recognizing what's working, fixing what isn't, and creating a workplace where accuracy, efficiency, and excellent public service are the standard.

If elected, you will join the Allen County Election Board. What would you bring to this role?

MANUEL: I am one of only two election professionals in Indiana who hold election administration certifications from both the Indiana Secretary of State and the National Association of Election Officials. I bring extensive hands-on experience, knowledge, and a strong commitment to protecting the integrity of our elections.

My experience includes formerly serving as the Assistant Director of Elections and the Election Technology and Security Manager for the Allen County Election Board. I have worked with the election board for more than 25 years in various capacities, including conducting poll worker training, serving on the ballot canvass board, programming election equipment, serving as a poll worker, and numerous other election duties.

This firsthand experience has given me a thorough understanding of the importance of accuracy, security and transparency, and knowledge of Indiana Election Law. I will bring that knowledge and experience to the Election Board with a collaborative approach focused on maintaining election integrity, through conducting transparent, accurate and secure elections.

ROBY: I would bring a commitment to fairness, transparency, accountability, and the belief that every eligible voter deserves to have their voice heard.

Election administration should never be about partisan advantage. It should be about protecting the integrity of the process, following the law, and maintaining public confidence in our elections.

I bring experience working within the court system, leadership experience, and a willingness to listen, ask questions, and work collaboratively. I believe in approaching difficult decisions thoughtfully, relying on facts rather than political pressure, and treating everyone with respect, regardless of political affiliation.

I would also prioritize voter education, accessibility, and supporting the election workers who make our elections possible.

Ultimately, my responsibility would be to the voters of Allen County. They deserve an election process that is accurate, secure, accessible, and worthy of their trust.

If elected, what are your primary goals?

MANUEL: My primary goal will be to build on the strong foundation already in place while continually looking for opportunities to pave the path forward for the Clerk's office.

Clerk, Page 9

CANDIDATES

Toshua Manuel



Manuel

Age (as of Nov. 3): 49
Home: Southern Allen County
Occupation: Chief Deputy Clerk of Courts
Political experience: First-time candidate

Keri Roby



Roby

Age (as of Nov. 3): 54
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Business owner
Political experience: First-time candidate

Allen County **Recorder**

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

A candidate is challenging the Allen County recorder to lead the department that preserves property records.

Recorder Nicole Keesling, a Republican, faces first-time candidate Cheyenne Stoppenhagen, a Democrat, in the general election.

Keesling defeated Allen County Councilman Bob Armstrong, R-at large, in the primary election for the party's nomination. Stoppenhagen was unopposed in the primary.

Keesling was first elected to the office in 2022.

The recorder's office keeps track of nearly 163,000 pieces of land in Allen County, including property records and property sales transaction.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette.

Stoppenhagen did not submit responses. Keesling's answers are below.

Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

A focus of this office is to preserve and maintain property records. How do you feel this process could be improved?

Since being elected Recorder, one of my priorities has been maintaining and preserving Allen County's recorded documents for future generations.

The standard is to preserve these records for 500 years, and we take that responsibility seriously. Every document that is recorded continues to be placed on microfilm and stored in a climate-controlled facility to help ensure its longevity.

I have also made preserving our historic books a priority. We have worked to restore and preserve nearly 100 books in the Recorder's Office. Each page is carefully treated to remove toxins and oils, the books are rebound, and the pages are placed in protective sleeves for additional protection.

More recently, we have begun placing our historic books in fire- and water-resistant binders to provide another layer of protection.

This work is about more than preserving old documents, it is about protecting Allen County's history and ensuring these records remain available for generations to come.

What is the greatest service this office provides?

The Recorder's Office offers several important services to Allen County residents, with one of our primary responsibilities being to maintain all property records for the county.

When Indiana became a state in 1816, the County Recorder's Office was the first county office established. Our state's founders understood that property ownership is the foundation of a functioning society and in order to protect property ownership, there must be an accurate and reliable record of who owns each property.

That remains the most important function of the Recorder's Office today. Imagine the chaos if no one could prove they owned their home or property. Accurate property records provide the foundation for protecting property rights and maintaining an orderly society.

We also provide a free Property Fraud Alert service, which I have worked hard to expand and increase participation in. In 2023, I added text notifications, which have become our most popular notification option.

Earlier this year, I also launched our free Notary Fraud Alert to help protect residents and combat notary fraud.

If elected, what are your primary goals?

For my next term, my top priority will be addressing property and real estate fraud, which continue to grow in our community and across the county. In just the past few months, I have encountered several cases in the Recorder's Office and learned of many more cases across the state. To combat this growing problem, I am working to strengthen partnerships with local law enforcement, community stakeholders, legislators, and state agencies to help maintain the integrity of real estate transactions and protect property owners.

CANDIDATE

Nicole Keesling



Keesling

Age (as of Nov. 3): 30
Home: New Haven
Occupation: Allen County Recorder
Political Experience: Elected as recorder in 2022 and vice chair of the Allen County Republican Party.

CLERK

Continued from Page 8

I will work to strengthen partnerships with local officials, courts, legislators and the Indiana Clerks Association to ensure our office is prepared to meet changing needs.

Protecting the integrity and security of our elections will remain a top priority. I will work with the Election Board to ensure elections are conducted accurately, fairly, and in accordance with Indiana law. I will prioritize maintaining accurate and accessible court records, providing transparency while carefully following all state laws and requirements.

I am determined to stay engaged with emerging technology and innovations. I will continue reviewing opportunities to responsibly make our work more efficient, accessible, and responsive to the people we serve. I am excited to continue with this momentum and will hit the ground running on January 1st.

Roby: My primary goal is to make the Allen County Clerk's Office a model of efficient, accountable, and accessible public service.

First, I want to ensure employees receive the training, cross-training, and support necessary to serve the public effectively. A knowledgeable, well-supported staff is essential to a successful office.

Second, I want to strengthen fiscal responsibility. Taxpayer dollars should be managed carefully, budgets should be evaluated regularly, and decisions should be made with transparency and accountability.

Third, I want to improve the public's experience. Whether someone is filing a court document, paying a fee, obtaining a marriage license, or seeking information, they deserve clear communication, timely assistance, and respectful treatment.

Finally, I want to foster a workplace culture where employees feel valued, professionalism is expected, and public service comes before politics.

I believe leadership is about more than holding an office. It's about taking responsibility for how that office serves the community.

Community First. Service Always.

FWCS board At Large

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

The Fort Wayne Community Schools at-large race will bring at least one new face to the board, and it will test the electability of an incumbent who switched seats mid-term.

The two seats will carry different term lengths – two and four years – so only one will be up for election in each cycle, beginning in 2028. The board approved the change in the spring.

Of those elected Nov. 3, the person with the least seniority on the board will serve two years. If neither has prior board experience, the person with the least votes will serve the shorter term.

Noah Smith is the only incumbent seeking election, but this is his first time running as an at-large candidate. He represented District 3 – generally the Snider High School area – from 2021 until May, when he moved to a vacant at-large seat.

The five other candidates are Matthew Crummey, Lee Daly, Giovanna Follo, Brandon Foster and Joe Jordan.

This is the first year of school board candidates could voluntarily declare a political party, but most in the FWCS at-large race either left the field blank or described themselves as independent or nonpartisan.

Crummey is the exception. His affiliation is with the American Solidarity party.

The candidates were asked to complete a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Responses were edited for length and clarity.

State legislators make decisions affecting public schools, including their funding. What do you view as a school board member's role in advocating for the district and/or public education at the state level?

CRUMMEY: The American Solidarity Party values a local-first approach to governance. FWCS is uniquely positioned as the largest district in the state, and we need to push for local autonomy in improving our community schools.

As a board member from a third party, I will work to break the two-party stalemate to bring the best ideas to the table. I will work with Democrats and Republicans to advocate for what we need and increase our ability to make improvements that make sense for our students, teachers and community.

DALY: I will try and convince legislators that the voucher program, that is so mismanaged that the $700+ million that is being sent out, would be better used to improve our public schools. I am not against the program. I think it was originally a good idea, but it is so grossly mismanaged that the percentage of students who really need it is dwindling rapidly.

FOLLO: As a school board member, it is my responsibility to advocate for the FWCS district and for public education overall. I may not be able to present myself as speaking on behalf of the board, unless otherwise directed, but I can speak as a board member, parent and educator. I take on these roles, and each informs me as a board member and the policy direction that I will support and advocate for. The FWCS school board is directed to make policy that balances state legislature and local needs. However, above all, student success should be at the center of all the advocacy. When I advocate at the state level, I am advocating for the students.

FOSTER: A school board member's job is to make sure taxpayers get a return on their investment. Indiana spends 47% of its state budget on K-12 education, yet in Fort Wayne we still see school closures the district cannot plan around, families sending their kids to buildings they do not feel safe in, and children stuck year after year in schools rated D or F.

That is not a funding problem alone. It is an accountability problem, and I would advocate for legislators to close that gap. Indiana already holds 9-year-olds accountable: a third grader who fails IREAD is retained. I believe the state should hold district leadership to the same standard. If a district has multiple schools rated D or F, the state should be able to step in and take over the responsibilities of the superintendent and district leadership, the same way it expects a struggling child to repeat a grade. Families deserve outcomes, not excuses, for what they are paying.

JORDAN: I believe a school board member has a responsibility to be an effective advocate for the district and for public education at the state level. While school boards govern locally, many decisions affecting our students, teachers and schools – including funding, accountability, staffing, curriculum and educational policy – are made at the state level.

As a board member, I would work to build strong relationships with our state legislators and ensure they understand the realities and needs of our district. I would communicate our priorities using data, local experiences and firsthand stories from students, families and educators.

I believe advocacy must be student-centered, fact-based and nonpartisan. My responsibility would be to support policies and resources that provide every student with the opportunity to succeed. When legislation benefits our students, I will support it; when it creates challenges, I will respectfully voice those concerns and advocate for constructive solutions.

Ultimately, I believe effective advocacy means being a strong, informed voice for our students, educators, families, and community.

SMITH: We must maintain an ongoing dialogue with state legislators to share our experiences and highlight the direct impact their policies have on school districts like Fort Wayne Community Schools.

As a representative of FWCS, I consistently advocate for traditional public education and what best serves our students. I actively gather feedback from diverse community stakeholders and synthesize that input for legislators, demonstrating how state-level support for districts like ours aligns with the shared vision of making Fort Wayne and Indiana a premier place to live, learn and grow.

Enrollment is important to public schools because it is tied to the state funding distributions. What do you think the district can do to remain attractive to families and/or what would you support as a board member?

CRUMMEY: We can no longer be content as the "last option" for

FWCS, Page 11

CANDIDATES

Matthew Crummey



Crummey

Age: 44
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Engineer
Political experience: First-time candidate

Lee Daly



Daly

Age: 63
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Retired FWCS elementary teacher
Political experience: First-time candidate

Giovanna Follo



Follo

Age: 56
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Professor
Political experience: First-time candidate

Brandon Foster



Foster

Age: 41
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Educational consultant
Political experience: First-time candidate.

Joe Jordan



Jordan

Age: 65
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: President and CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Indiana
Political experience: First-time candidate

Noah Smith



Smith

Age: 55
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Commercial banker
Political experience: FWCS board (appointed 2021, elected 2024)

FWCS

Continued from Page 10

families. We have to change the way we provide value to the community. Parents want a good education for their children, and they want a safe, disciplined and non-disruptive educational environment. Additionally, parents want to have confidence that their values will not be overridden with extreme views and hidden agendas. If the local public school won't provide this type of education, they have the freedom to choose a school that does.

There is only one way out. We need to compete for students, and we need to make the case to families that their neighborhood school is the right choice for them. FWCS should open up to part-time students, to alternative education models and to value-based educational initiatives. Supporting and encouraging opportunities for students to receive a more holistic education based on the values their family and community share. This is how we increase buy-in and rebuild trust.

DALY: We need to show that our students far outweigh the private sector and parochial sector in achievement in all subject matters. We also need to show that our graduates far outweigh the others in landing great jobs and career opportunities after graduation.

FOLLO: As a FWCS parent, and like many other parents, I believe the district remains attractive to families and their students by providing teachers with a supportive work environment, which in turn provides students with an engaged learning experience.

FWCS has an innovative and unique combination of programming that supports a variety of career paths and an abundance of electives that we must continue to support.

We need to ensure K-5 includes career path exploration and does not lock students into a career choice. In middle school, we need to solidify the understanding and application of English language arts, algebra and the sciences. This includes the continued use of study tables and perhaps extra tutoring. In high school, we need to solidify our commitment to student success by engaging with students to increase attendance, involving the wellness teams when issues arise, encouraging classroom discussion, giving students time to reflect on what they are learning, and providing specific PSAT and SAT after-school tutoring. This would benefit all students no matter their career paths.

FOSTER: Good schools have good enrollment. It is not a mystery. To improve enrollment, we need to hire the best superintendent, who hires the best district leadership team, who then hires the best principals, who then hire the best teachers.

Right now, that chain is broken, and families are leaving. Southwest Allen County Schools approved 180 nonresident transfer requests for this school year alone, and Fort Wayne families are part of that number. That number will keep growing as long as the same leadership stays in place. If we want to improve enrollment, we have to improve our schools first, and to do that, we need new leadership at the top.

JORDAN: Enrollment is critically important because it directly impacts the resources available to our schools and, ultimately, the opportunities we can provide students. I believe the best way to grow and retain enrollment is to give families compelling reasons to choose – and stay in – our schools.

As a board member, I would support a district-wide focus on academic excellence, student safety, strong extracurricular opportunities, career readiness and meaningful family engagement. We must continually ask: Why would a family choose our schools over another option? And why would they stay?

We also need to be intentional about telling our story. We should celebrate our successes and ensure families understand the quality of our programs, the excellence of our educators, student achievements and the opportunities available throughout the district.

Ultimately, we should not chase enrollment simply for the funding. We should build schools that families want to attend, and enrollment will follow. By consistently delivering an excellent educational experience and preparing every student for success, we strengthen enrollment and the long-term health of our district.

SMITH: The district must continue offering robust, varied educational programming that meets the diverse goals and desires of our students and families. Additionally, we need to proactively share our achievements while remaining transparent and accountable when addressing challenges. As a board member, I will support initiatives that help every student develop academically, socially and civically into productive members of our community.

If elected, how would you factor public/constituent opinion into your decision-making?

CRUMMEY: The public is invited to attend school board meetings, and I would love to hear their concerns beforehand. I can't promise that I will always agree with recommendations, but I can promise that I will listen and try to understand the community's concerns.

Parents are the primary educators of their children by natural right. They have the final say in what values and education their child receives. When parents talk, the school board and administration need to listen. Shutting parents out is why we lose their trust and consequently they enroll somewhere else. If we want a community that is engaged in their schools, then we don't get to play the "expert" card.

DALY: I have no political aspirations and truly believe that the opinions of the citizens of Fort Wayne should always to taken into account. I will make it a priority to listen to the teachers and parents on issues that affect the students of FWCS. I will strive to be as transparent as possible so that there are no surprises on issues that directly affect everyone.

FOLLO: If elected, I believe it is crucial to speak with those within the FWCS community, whether they voted for me or not. The FWCS school board creates policy, but it is all the stakeholders – parents, students, teachers, administrators, the superintendent and the greater FWCS community – that must work collaboratively to make programming work, make curriculum effective and make student success the goal.

There will be times when we can have involved, extended dialogue and other times when we can't, but dialogue must happen. Communication has been improving, and it must continue to improve.

The school board should provide reasoning for decisions and open communication with its constituents. The FWCS district is one of the largest in Indiana; this type of interaction is difficult and will remain difficult, but the district needs to try to connect with parents, students and administrators. The public needs to be involved and have agency in the decision-making process. They are the ones who will make it work; they need to be part of it.

FOSTER: I told a district leader that setting a goal of 15% proficiency at a school meant accepting that 85% would not read on grade level. He laughed and said if he set the target any higher, people would think he had had too many drinks. I was stunned that he saw setting higher expectations as akin to being seen as drunk. Our families do not deserve leaders who think believing in our students means being inebriated, and neither do the teachers who work every day to help them learn. That is the deficit mindset I intend to root out of this district.

As a board member, I will treat public input as evidence, not formality, and require data and results before approving initiatives, not after they fail and principals take the blame while leadership keeps its salary. I will push the district to hire and promote based on qualifications and results, not proximity to the chief academic officer because this practice has led to FWCS having some of the lowest ranked schools in the state.

JORDAN: If elected, listening to the community would be a fundamental part of my responsibility as a school board member. A school board must always remember that it serves students, families, educators and the broader community.

I would actively seek input through community meetings, school visits and conversations with parents, educators and community leaders. People want to know that their voices are not only heard but genuinely considered.

At the same time, I believe board members must make decisions based on the best long-term interests of all students, not simply the loudest or most popular opinion. I would listen carefully, examine the facts and data, consider the impact on students and the district, and make informed decisions aligned with our mission.

There will be times when reasonable people disagree. When that happens, I will respectfully explain my reasoning and remain open to dialogue.

Effective leadership requires both an open ear and the courage to make difficult decisions. I will listen, respect every perspective and always keep students at the center of my decisions.

SMITH: I evaluate all governance decisions through two core principles: First, how will this action positively impact student growth and educational outcomes? Second, does this align with the priorities and expectations of our community? Student growth must remain our highest priority, but we must also act as responsible stewards for the taxpayers and public stakeholders who make our educational initiatives possible.

FWCS board District 1

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

The matchup for a Fort Wayne Community Schools board seat will be a repeat race between a four-term incumbent and a challenger who has twice run for election.

Jeannette Jaquish has been Julie Hollingsworth's only opponent for the District 1 seat since Hollingsworth defeated two others to join the board in 2011.

Hollingsworth, a retired FWCS teacher and coach, retained her post four years ago by winning 71% of the votes.

District 1 generally covers the school system's northwest side. It includes two secondary schools – Northrop High and Shawnee Middle – along with Bloomingdale, Franke Park, Lincoln, Price and Washington Center elementary schools.

Jaquish unsuccessfully ran for an at-large seat in 2014.

School board positions were nonpartisan until this year, although declaring a political party was optional.

Jaquish, an independent playwright and children's theater director, filed as a Libertarian. Hollingsworth left that field blank.

The candidates were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

State legislators make decisions affecting public schools, including their funding. What do you view as a school board member's role in advocating for the district and/or public education at the state level?

HOLLINGSWORTH: Board members need to stay informed regarding education law and policies as well as education bills proposed in the state legislature. We need to inform parents and the community about laws and issues affecting public education, encouraging them to share their concerns with legislators. Board members can also communicate with legislators, as well as testify at hearings. Board members can also advocate for the district by highlighting district programs, business partnerships, student successes and staff accomplishments.

JAQUISH: I would not advocate that FWCS receive more funding per student than other public schools.

Being the Indiana school district with the most students, FWCS can spend less per pupil due to bulk discounts and maximum student usage of shared items like basketball hoops, nurses, sign language instructors, drinking fountains and microscopes. FWCS should use its over 28,000 student population advantage to offer more choices to its students' families, and then observe which circumstances have better outcomes.

School boards must often make decisions unpopular with a segment of the community. A school board should, if possible, survey parents before new policies become people-screaming-at-the-board issues. With wise pre-planning, a policy can be applied only onto students whose parents choose it, by establishing the policy only on certain classrooms, buildings or schools. Policies that could be chosen, yes or no, by parents for their children could be armed teachers, medical masks, sex education, birth-certificate-gender or identifying-as-a-gender restrooms, cellphones allowed in class, specific history curriculums or dress codes.

Enrollment is important to public schools because it is tied to the state funding distributions. What do you think the district can do to remain attractive to families and/or what would you support as a board member?

HOLLINGSWORTH: For FWCS to remain attractive to families, we need to emphasize recruiting, hiring and developing teachers. We need to value them and support them with resources, which becomes more difficult with continued cuts to public education. FWCS also needs to continue to support the wide variety of clubs, arts programs and athletics that offer something for every student. We need to communicate effectively with parents and families regarding issues that are important to them. We need to continue to provide clean, safe educationally appropriate school buildings.

JAQUISH: FWCS board members should visit schools unexpectedly and listen to complaints. FWCS should be creatively competing with charter and voucher schools instead of criticizing their existence. Competition motivates improvements.

My kids complained for years that no air conditioning upstairs at Northwood Middle School caused them to leave sweat puddles on their seats, and the fans made it hard to hear. The short lunch periods at Franke Park Elementary meant kids often had to discard half their lunch uneaten. I hear years-old reports of unchecked bullying and teachers quitting because administrators don't correct disruptive students. My kids said when a few students went to the religion bus parked outside their elementary, the teaching stopped inside the classroom. Are these fixed?

The Indiana-mandated count days – one in fall, one in spring – motivate schools to do extra fun events on those two days to boost enrollment, which determines half the school year's funding. But if a student transfers to another school, the funding does not follow. A calculated blend of daily attendance and enrollment should fund a school.

If elected, how would you factor public/constituent opinion into your decision-making?

HOLLINGSWORTH: On any decision, the board always considers the opinion of parents, students, staff, taxpayers and community members. Contact information for board members is on the FWCS website and available to anyone to share a concern or issue. When it comes to district planning, FWCS may form focus groups to solicit public input.

JAQUISH: I will listen and investigate, which does not explicitly violate the bylaw that says school board members should be "respecting the chain of command by referring all questions or concerns to the superintendent's office and by discussing them only when appropriate at a regular meeting after failure of administrative solution."

If elected, I will have no power except persuasion. A school board is absolutely political. It spends taxes extracted by the threat of prison to either benefit or inflict education upon the children of others. In spite of being a Libertarian, I endorse tax-funded public schools where choices are available because early in a family's life, a quality education is often unaffordable.

My mother could barely house and feed us, and public school educated us, but I know that my inadequate education would have been better with competing schools. I want to influence FWCS policy to teach free marketeer job skills and work ethic in an invigorating joyful, economic way to benefit all.

CANDIDATES

Julia "Julie" Hollingsworth



Hollingsworth

Age: 73
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Retired, former educator
Political experience: Four terms as the Fort Wayne Community Schools board member for District 1

Jeannette Jaquish



Jaquish

Age: 68
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Independent playwright and children's theater director. Formerly ran The Firehouse Theater in Fort Wayne.
Political experience: Ran unsuccessfully for FWCS board in 2014 and 2022.

VOTE FOR:

★ Affordability, Lower Taxes and Fiscal Responsibility
★ Transparent, Accountable and Accessible Representation
★ Safe and Strong Communities

Allen County GOP

ALLEN COUNTY LEADERSHIP



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County Commissioner District 2



PAUL MOSS
County Commissioner District 3



TOSHUA MANUEL
Allen County Circuit Court Clerk



JACQUELYNN SCHEUMAN
Allen County Auditor



TROY HERSHBERGER
Allen County Sheriff



TESA HELGE
Prosecuting Attorney 38th Judicial Circuit



NICOLE KEESLING
Allen County Recorder



STACEY O'DAY
Allen County Assessor



MIKE CLENDENEN
County Council District 1



MARK HAGAR
County Council District 2



ERIC TIPPMANN
County Council District 3



DON WYSS
County Council District 4

STATE REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP



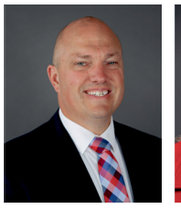
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LIZ BROWN
State Senator District 15



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State Representative District 84



DAVE HEINE
State Representative District 85

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REMEMBER, VOTE REPUBLICAN ON OR BEFORE NOVEMBER 3RD

Paid for by the Allen County Republican Party, Steven R. Shine, Chairman

EACS board District 2E

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

An incumbent on the East Allen County Schools board will face a challenger in her first bid for reelection.

Retired teacher Joni Price is seeking the District 2E seat held by Beth Wood, who won the post in an uncontested race four years ago. The term is for four years.

District 2E covers a broad area of east Allen County.

The Nov. 3 election is the first in which school board candidates could voluntarily declare a political party. Price filed as a Republican. Wood did not state an affiliation.

This is the only contested EACS board race. Incumbents Tim Hines and Pamela Dukes, who both filed as Republicans, are unopposed.

Price and Wood were asked to complete a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Wood did not provide answers. Price's responses are as follows.

State legislators make decisions affecting public schools, including their funding. What do you view as a school board member's role in advocating for the district and/or public education at the state level?

A school board member should be a strong bridge between the community and state lawmakers – advocating for local needs, building relationships, keeping parents and taxpayers informed, and inviting legislators to see our schools firsthand. Above all, every effort should remain focused on strengthening our schools and improving student achievement.

Enrollment is important to public schools because it is tied to the state funding distributions. What do you think the district can do to remain attractive to families and/or what would you support as a board member?

EACS offers the best of both worlds: a small-town feel with big opportunities. Our five community-based high schools preserve local pride, tradition, and strong community support while offering innovative programs and personalized learning opportunities that meet the needs of every student – from early childhood through college and career pathways.

If elected, how would you factor public/constituent opinion into your decision-making?

Public input matters. As a board member, I will listen actively, seek diverse perspectives, and make transparent, evidence-based decisions. While confidentiality must be respected, building trust requires keeping our community informed and explaining the reasoning behind decisions whenever possible.

CANDIDATE

Joni Price



Price

Age: 60
Home: Woodburn
Occupation: Retired educator
Political Experience: First-time candidate

NORTHEAST INDIANA

U.S. representative District 3

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

A concrete contractor is challenging a longtime politician in the election to represent Indiana's third district in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Democrat Kelly Thompson and Rep. Marlin Stutzman, a Republican, are campaigning for the seat. Voters will also have the option of voting for write-in candidate Phillip Beachy, an Independent.

Stutzman was elected to the seat in 2024. He previously served the district from 2010 to 2017.

The third district represents much of northeast Indiana, including LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, DeKalb, Whitley, Allen, Huntington, Wells, Adams and part of Kosciusko counties.

Thompson was unopposed in the primary. Stutzman defeated challenger Jon Kenworthy in the primary election for the Republican nomination.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette.

Stutzman did not submit responses. Thompson's answers are below.

Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

What areas of public policy are you personally passionate about?

I am focusing my policies on the areas the people of northeast Indiana have told me are most needed by them: healthcare, education, and affordability.

What do you think is the most prominent issue or challenge that the constituents of this district face?

The people of northeast Indiana are hardworking honest people who simply are not able to afford their lives due to low wages and high prices and combined these issues cause stress and trauma in their lives. We work and pay our taxes but are told that there is no money for things like childcare, which as a HIGH return on investment, as we watch our tax dollars get spent on an illegal war.

If elected, what are your top goals?

Slow down and Regulate AI, restore the rule of law, defend the constitution, get big money out of politics, and pass legislation that protects our people and our planet. Improved Medicare for All, Free Public College, Free Universal Childcare, enforce anti-trust laws, and make sure that record corporate profits don't continue WITHOUT record worker wages.

CANDIDATE

Kelly Thompson



Thompson

Age (as of Nov. 3): 61
Home: North Webster
Occupation: Concrete contractor
Political experience: Ran for state representative District 22 in 2020.

Most school board hopefuls pick party

ASHLEY SLOBODA
The Journal Gazette

Voters in only one Allen County school district have the option this fall to maintain its board's nonpartisan status.

Candidates had the option to file as Republicans, Democrats and other political party members because of state legislation approved last year, and most unchallenged local incumbents embraced party labels.

The county's four school districts collectively have 18 people running for a dozen seats on the Nov. 3 ballot. Seven candidates left the field blank or indicated they were nonpartisan. Republicans represented seven of the office-seekers, and none filed as a Democrat.

Fort Wayne Community Schools is the only district where the election of a partisan candidate is not guaranteed.

Of the 1,040 school board hopefuls statewide, 50% declared no political party affiliation while the other half identified as Republicans, Democrats, independents or another party, according to the Indiana School Boards Association.

School board races are excluded from straight-party voting under state law.

A nonpartisan organization, the ISBA will continue its practice of not addressing politics in its board member training programs, which include the New Board Member Academy, said Terry Spradlin, executive director.

The major functions of school boards include approving budgets and contracts; hiring, evaluating and, when necessary, dismissing the superintendent; adopting policies that guide school operations; and establishing the district's vision, mission, goals and priorities.

"Politics don't really factor into those areas of governance," Spradlin said.

Even so, former superintendent Phil Downs is wary of the departure from nonpartisan boards. He worked in K-12 education for about 30 years, including as the leader of Southwest Allen County Schools.


Downs

"Partisan elections will add another level of distraction to the school's job of assisting all parents as they raise their children," said Downs, now executive director of strategic initiatives at Trine University. "It will encourage bad adult behavior in front of children."

Uncommon setup

Indiana's new practice of opening school board elections to partisan candidates puts it in the minority nationwide.

In 40 states, school board candidates must run in nonpartisan elections, the Indiana School Boards Association said, and four states require partisan elections.

Indiana is among six that allow both partisan and nonpartisan candidacies.

Chad Wierzbinski, the Allen County Democratic Party chairman, dislikes the change and said he believes this could lead to uglier, more contentious school board elections.

"This isn't something I believe Hoosiers were asking for," Wierzbinski said. "I'm very disappointed we've gone political in these races."

Steve Shine, his Republican counterpart, views the party label as helpful for voters. Designating a political affiliation reflects candidates' personal values and philosophies, he said.

But Shine does not want or encourage any Republican elected to school board to seek his opinion about a particular education issue.


Shine

"I am not qualified to do that, nor would I do that," Shine said, emphasizing the party will not get involved in school board decisions.

Downs, the former superintendent, isn't convinced school boards will be immune from party politics.

"Partisan politics does not promote the patience and nuance necessary for this difficult but essential role," he said by email. "Partisan board members will be tempted to drift from the mission of the schools to seize on issues for their party's advantage, which will make compromises with families and the community harder."

Some candidates might feel forced to declare a party, Downs said, and that could keep many potential candidates on the sidelines because they dislike partisan politics.

This year's statewide school board elections attracted 38 fewer candidates than the races two years ago, when 1,078 people sought seats.

Based on those numbers, the ISBA said, there is no evidence that political affiliation has affected the candidate pool because modest fluctuation from one election to another is normal.

Locally, Allen County averaged 19 candidates in the five previous school board elections. The 12 seats attracted 15 to 24 candidates, depending on the year.

This year's ballot has 18, three more than two years ago.

Party benefits

In many local races, unopposed incumbents are declaring a party.

Locally, six unchallenged board members – two each in East Allen County Schools, Northwest Allen County Schools and Southwest Allen County Schools – declared a party. Each are running as Republicans.

These candidates are the least advantaged by a partisan label because they have name recognition and are unopposed, said Mike Wolf, the acting director of the Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics at Purdue University Fort Wayne.

Their decision to declare a party "indicates there are certainly some real benefits of having the partisan label attached," Wolf said.

Both local political party chairmen said candidates running under their party's banner would receive the party's support.

This includes access to the Republican party's database, which can help candidates identify Republican voters. That's something provided upon request to any party member seeking election, Shine said.

Embracing a party label as a school board candidate could give such elected officials an advantage if they later decide to seek other local or statewide offices, Wolf said.

asloboda@jg.net

AT A GLANCE

Fort Wayne Community Schools

Jeannette Jaquish, District 1, Libertarian
Julie Hollingsworth, District 1
Antonette Payne, District 4
Brandon Foster, at large, independent
Giovanna Follo, at large
Joe Jordan, at large, nonpartisan
Lee Daly, at large, independent
Matthew Crummey, at large, American Solidarity Party
Noah Smith, at large

East Allen County Schools

Tim Hines, District 1R, Republican
Beth Wood, District 2E
Joni Price, District 2E, Republican
Pamela Dukes, District 3E, Republican

Northwest Allen County Schools

Kristi Schlatter, District 3
Darren Vogt, at large, Republican
Liz Hathaway, at large, Republican

Southwest Allen County Schools

Kim Moppert, at large, Republican
Stephanie Veit, at large, Republican
Incumbent

Source: Allen County Election Board

BY THE NUMBERS

1,040 candidates for school board races statewide
50% declared no political party affiliation
36% declared as Republican
7% declared as independent
6% declared as Democrat
1% declared as Libertarian or with American Solidarity Party

Source: Indiana School Boards Association

NORTHWEST ALLEN COUNTY

Commissioner District 2

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

Local professionals in finance and government affairs will face off in hopes of clinching the northwest Allen County commissioner seat.

Kate Conner, a Democrat, and Republican Ozzie Mitson are campaigning for voters' support.

The successful candidate will fill the District 2 position. Commissioners are divided into districts despite representing all Allen County residents and being on all area ballots. The three-member board represents the county's legislative and executive branches, approving ordinances that primarily affect unincorporated Allen County and policies that affect county employees.

The seat will be vacated at the end of this year by Commissioner Therese Brown, who is retiring.

Both candidates were unopposed in the primary election.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

What do you believe is the most important function or duty of the Allen County Board of Commissioners?

CONNER: The most important duty of the Commissioners is to serve the people of Allen County. The most important function of the Board of Commissioners is their planning and zoning powers, ensuring that public health and safety is prioritized.

MITSON: The most important duty of the Allen County Board of Commissioners is to represent the families, businesses and communities of Allen County while ensuring county government operates efficiently, responsibly and within its proper role.

Commissioners must be good stewards of taxpayer dollars and provide reliable core services, including roads, bridges, drainage, public safety infrastructure and responsible planning for future growth. Just as importantly, county government should remain accountable and accessible to the people it serves.

I believe commissioners should focus on delivering essential services well, protecting taxpayers and property rights, and making decisions that preserve the quality of life and character that make Allen County a great place to live, work and raise a family.

The commissioners' legislative power would be transferred to County Council if the population exceeds 450,000. Do you think the commissioners or County Council should be the legislative branch? Why?

CONNER: I believe legislative powers of Allen County should remain with the Board of Commissioners. If the County Council, who creates our budget, also gains the power to make laws, it puts too much power in one place. When the same people that write our laws also fund them, transparency and accountability diminish, making it easier to hide questionable spending, reasoning behind contract decisions, and limit the people's ability to challenge harmful policy.

While I believe the County Commissioners and Council should work collaboratively for the good of all people in Allen County, shifting legislative power to the fiscal body removes the checks and balances that the system intentionally designed to prevent misuse of power and reduce the risk of corruption.

MITSON: If elected, I intend to perform the duties of County Commissioner as prescribed by Indiana law and to respect the proper roles of each branch of county government. If Allen County's population surpasses 450,000, there should be a thoughtful and transparent discussion about how any change in legislative authority would affect accountability, representation and efficient government.

Ultimately, state law determines the structure, but the views of Allen County residents and local officials should be an important part of that conversation. Whatever structure is in place, my priority would remain the same: keeping government accountable to taxpayers, avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy and ensuring that decisions are made as efficiently and as close to the people as possible.

If elected, what are your primary goals?

CONNER: My first goal if elected is to zone against data centers, to ensure we protect Allen County's farmland and rural character. I will promote responsible, sustainable economic growth by supporting projects that create permanent jobs, that add lasting value and avoid strain on local resources. I want to encourage development of affordable housing and community resources, while pushing back on urban sprawl.

I also want to work with the County Council to limit tax abatements, strengthening their ability to fund repairs to our roads and bridges, and improve funding for community resources. Above all, I want to be a leader that listens and helps all people in Allen County.

MITSON: My primary goals are to keep Allen County safe, financially strong and prepared for continued growth while protecting the character of our communities. That means investing responsibly in roads, bridges and drainage; supporting law enforcement and first responders; maintaining a competitive environment for businesses and job creation; and protecting taxpayers through disciplined budgeting and transparent government.

I also want to make county government easier to navigate by reducing unnecessary red tape and improving coordination between local government entities. Growth should be thoughtful and should respect property rights, neighborhoods and farmland while ensuring our infrastructure can support future needs.

Above all, I want Allen County government to remain focused on its core responsibilities. Taxpayers should expect efficient services, responsible use of their money and elected officials who are accessible, accountable and committed to preserving the qualities that have made Allen County a strong place to raise a family and build a business.

CANDIDATES

Kate Conner



Conner

Age (as of Nov. 3): 33
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Finance
Political Experience: First-time candidate.

Ozzie Mitson



Mitson

Age (as of Nov. 3): 45
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Director of Government Affairs for IU Health Fort Wayne
Political experience: First-time candidate.

SOUTHWEST ALLEN COUNTY

Commissioner District 3

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

Two candidates with experience running for public office hope to secure enough votes to serve as Allen County commissioner next year.

Democrat Jorge Fernandez, an educator, and Republican Paul Moss, a retired healthcare consultant, are running for the southwest Allen County commissioner seat. The candidates are not strangers to their parties with Fernandez and Moss, a former Allen County Council member, each running for several offices in the past.

Commissioners are divided into districts despite representing all Allen County residents and being on all area ballots. The three-member board represents the county's legislative and executive branches, approving ordinances that primarily affect unincorporated Allen County and policies that affect county employees.

The seat will be vacated at the end of this year by Commissioner Rich Beck, who is retiring.

Moss defeated Ewelina Connolly in the primary for the Republican nomination by 67 votes. He initially won by 65 votes, and two more were secured in a recount. Fernandez was unopposed in the primary.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

CANDIDATES

Jorge Fernandez



Fernandez

Age (as of Nov. 3): 38
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Educator
Political experience: Ran for Fort Wayne Community Schools board in 2024 and 2019; Fort Wayne mayor in 2023; Allen County Council at large in 2022; and state representative District 50 in 2016, 2018, and 2020.

Paul Moss



Moss

Age (as of Nov. 3): 63
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Former healthcare executive
Political experience: Served as St. Joe Township Advisory Board member and two-term Allen County councilman at large after 2004 election; ran for Southwest Allen County Schools board in 2020 and state representative District 52 in 2012.

What do you believe is the most important function or duty of the Allen County Board of Commissioners?

FERNANDEZ: The Allen County Board of Commissioners decisions have such an important impact on Allen County's quality of life that are so wide ranging, it is hard to pick one, but I would say its environmental protective powers.

This includes how it controls the majority of the Allen County Drainage Board, which makes important decisions regarding how stormwater is handled throughout the county; to the zoning powers it has in certain parts of the county as which has impacted Stop the Quarry efforts (I opposed the quarry proposal southwest along with them) or the part of Project Zodiac that was rezoned before it was added to Fort Wayne city limits; to the ability to decide whether to get the county involved in trash and recycling pickup in areas not already services by cities and towns including those outside of those city limits; to the appointment of individuals on Allen County Health Board and their involvement in septic systems (including when large corporations like those behind Project Zodiac file for one).

MOSS: The commissioners need to make sure county government works the way people expect it to. That means keeping roads and infrastructure in good condition, supporting public safety, managing county operations and being careful with taxpayer dollars.

I have spent enough time in county government to know that good decisions usually come down to preparation, communication and follow-through. Commissioners have to work with County Council, department heads and other elected officials, and they have to understand how one decision can affect several parts of county government.

The job is not about creating more government. It is about making sure the government we already have is doing its job well.

The commissioners' legislative power would be transferred to County Council if the population exceeds 450,000. Do you think the commissioners or County Council should be the legislative branch? Why?

FERNANDEZ: My understanding is that context on this question is wrong, as the population change doesn't trigger change in county structure, because only the population as of a certain date selected by Indiana General Assembly is applicable for which counties have County Commissioners serve as legislative body. So seemingly only likely chance of this change occurring during the 2027-2031 term I am seeking would be due to action of the General Assembly.

My answer comes with caveat that I don't think that major changes should occur in nature of elected officials jobs part way through their terms (as I think voters should have a good idea of what powers they are expecting certain individuals to have when they go to vote on those individuals) and also with the caveat that the vote 3 for 3 seat format for at-large election for county council should be changed, so that the dynamics of one seat does not affect the other seats. With those caveats, I think fiscal body should have legislative powers in this county.

MOSS: The commissioners need to make sure county government works the way people expect it to. That means keeping roads and infrastructure in good condition, supporting public safety, managing county operations and being careful with taxpayer dollars.

I have spent enough time in county government to know that good decisions usually come down to preparation, communication and follow-through. Commissioners have to work with County Council, department heads and other elected officials, and they have to understand how one decision can affect several parts of county government.

The job is not about creating more government. It is about making sure the government we already have is doing its job well.

If elected, what are your primary goals?

FERNANDEZ: I would describe my biggest goals are to make county government more transparent and for the actions in this seat to be consistently anti-corruption and against abuse of power.

From improving way that the county does contracting to reducing and eliminating waste in government (including by working to keep the jail from expanding its population any more, for example), a goal of mine is for Allen County government to work hard for the hard working families of Allen County.

Correspondingly, when out-of-state corporations come into this county and then try to exploit its workers and resources and also damage its quality of life; I want to get to point where the county government works to stop that instead of assisting.

A related goal of mine is to encourage zoning that focused on urban infill rather than paving over arable land. I want to better protect environmentally sensitive areas and farmland from development. I want to work to adjust zoning in areas where Allen County Commissioners have jurisdiction to reflect this goal.

MOSS: My goals are to keep county government financially sound, support law enforcement, maintain our infrastructure and make sure Allen County remains a good place to live and do business.

I have always believed government should be careful with other people's money. Before adding spending, programs or employees, we should first ask whether there is a better way to use the resources we already have.

I also want the county to stay ahead of roads, bridges, drainage and other infrastructure needs. Delaying necessary maintenance often costs taxpayers more in the long run.

Allen County is growing, and that brings opportunities as well as challenges. We should welcome good growth without losing sight of the critical importance of personal property rights, fiscal responsibility and the needs of the people who already live here.

3 counties weigh casino referendum

SHERRY SLATER
The Journal Gazette

The casino question on Allen, DeKalb and Steuben county ballots next month might be expressed as a simple choice: money or morality.

Many elected officials support allowing a casino to open. The accompanying windfall is compelling. A casino operation pays millions each year in local and state taxes. They say the tax income would be enough to offset impending painful budget cuts that Indiana Senate Enrolled Act 1 is forcing city and county officials to consider as a result of property tax caps.

Allen County supporters say a casino would result in 2,000 new permanent jobs and bring $100 million in new revenue to the area, according to independent consultants' projections cited on the supporters' website, yesforallen.org.

Residents who oppose legalized gaming in their communities have put forth an ABCs of concerns. They worry about increased addiction, bankruptcies and crime.

Supporters say residents who are against gaming are overstating the dangers.

Casino opponents in Allen County say the proponents are the ones doing the exaggerating.

CBRE, the consulting firm, said in its report that 947 of the 1,676 projected jobs are direct hires at the proposed casino. The rest are estimates of additional jobs supported elsewhere, casino critics say on their website savenein.com.

"It does not subtract jobs lost when residents shift money and workers away from local restaurants, hotels, retailers, entertainment and other businesses," the website says. "So neither 2,000 nor 1,676 is a count of net new local jobs."

Each camp seems to have staked its position out of fear.

The question voters must decide is: Which outcome is more likely and more frightening?

The debate's winning hand will emerge when the referendums' votes are tallied in each county.



Stan Sussina | The Journal Gazette

Gabi Bradley places a pro-casino sign in front of a home on West Wayne Street on Monday.

AT A GLANCE

If gaming referendum succeeds

If at least 51% of Allen County voters who indicate a preference on the gaming referendum support it, that doesn't mean Allen will definitely get a casino.

Voters in either DeKalb or Steuben counties – or both – might also approve their gaming referendums. If so, any interested casino company would have the opportunity to weigh the pros and cons of each location. The decision might rest on the availability of property at an attractive price with adequate infrastructure, highway access and a reliable local workforce.

Proposals are due to the Indiana Gaming Commission by Dec. 1. Submissions must by released to the public on or before Jan. 15, according to the legislation. The commission must make a final decision on any proposals by April 15.

Voters in all three counties should know within six months whether a casino is coming to their community. Only one additional gaming license has been approved by state regulators.

It's also possible that no casino operator will step up with a proposal. One potential stumbling block is the state legislation's requirement that a winning proposal must include an investment of at least $500 million in the casino, hotel and restaurant or restaurants. Another $150 million must be paid to the state in five equal annual installments of $30 million.

The state's general fund would receive $100 million of that total, and the shuttered riverboat fund would get the remaining $50 million.

– Sherry Slater, The Journal Gazette



Borne



Haffner

Even the odds

Tom Borne and Tim Haffner didn't want to gamble on Allen County's referendum outcome. They are unapologetic about their desire for local governments to hit the tax-dollars jackpot a casino would bring.

So Borne, a retired advertising executive, and Haffner, an attorney whose clients include the city of Fort Wayne, hired a national firm to conduct a scientific poll of 400 registered

Casino, Page 19

CASINO

Continued from Page 18

Allen County voters. The result was a statistical tie between those for it and those against.

Borne and Haffner assembled a local group of high-profile leaders to join their effort to tilt the odds in favor of casino gambling.

"All we need is 51%," Borne said.

The group, formed last year, includes architect Mike Gouloff; automotive group president Tom Kelley; social services executive and school board member Steve Corona. The group also includes union official Kyle Gresham and marketing firm owners Kara Kelley and Megan Bennett.

Corona said he's particularly concerned about maintaining adequate school funding. Gouloff said it's inevitable that a casino eventually will open here, possibly one operated by Native Americans, so it might as well be on the community's terms.

And Kelley said he wants casino tax dollars to go toward humanitarian efforts, including job training, mental health issues and addressing homelessness.

Greater Fort Wayne,Inc., the local chamber alliance and the city and county's lead contact for economic development projects, supports the pro-casino efforts.

Borne said they're trying to even the odds, which might be tilted toward negativity. "There's a faction in Fort Wayne that says 'no' to everything," he said.

Haffner said moral high ground can influence some voters' thinking.

"People choose to oppose things they don't want other people to do," he said.

Generating tourism

And as for concerns about gambling addiction, bankruptcies and increased crime?

"I happen to believe the detriments are grossly overstated," Haffner said, adding that the group of casino supporters wants to educate the public with factual information.

People need to understand, he said, that as Indiana Senate Enrolled Act 1's effects increasingly take effect in coming years, money coming to local governments is going to decrease. That will affect elected officials' ability to fund public schools, to repair roads and bridges, to provide police and fire protection, to support the library and myriad other things residents expect local governments to do.

Taxes paid by a casino could offset those losses, Haffner said.

Fort Wayne Mayor Sharon Tucker shares their view and referred to the same legislation to explain her stance.

"With the ongoing financial impacts of Senate Enrolled Act 1, particularly the uncertainty of future revenues coming in over time, it's vital to look for ways to grow and succeed. That's my duty as mayor to advocate for Fort Wayne and look for revenue opportunities," she said in a statement.

Tucker said she's optimistic that a casino would generate jobs, tourism and other economic development opportunities.

"Having access to additional revenues would lead to continued investments in public safety, local infrastructure and quality-of-life amenities," she said. "A casino would also assist our efforts in being a sustainable and viable community now and in the future."

Because some concerns have been identified, Tucker said, city officials would be proactive by creating programs to help people negatively affected by gaming.

She made it clear, however, that Fort Wayne officials aren't placing all their chips in one pot.

"In addition to a possible casino," she said, "we continue to explore all avenues for financial growth and replacement revenue to set us on a course for a brighter tomorrow."



Stan Sussina | The Journal Gazette

A sign against a proposed casino is seen in front of a home on West Jefferson Boulevard on Monday.

'The voters decide'

Commissioners in Allen, DeKalb and Steuben counties were also asked to provide their views on the gaming referendum. Only Andy Laughlin, Steuben County commissioner, responded.

"I support bringing the opportunity for a casino resort to Steuben County through the ballot question. This lets the voters decide, and is what all three of us commissioners were pushing for during the legislative session," he said in a statement.

"While we get our three individual votes in November, our job right now is to prepare the county for the possibility and bring objective and factual information about the process to the community," Laughlin said. "We are a county where tourism is our number one economic driver, and I believe a casino resort would be a good fit for us in that aspect."

Laughlin noted that Interstate 69 and the Indiana Toll Road intersect at Steuben County, which borders Ohio and Michigan.

"This would not only bring people from outside the area to spend time in the county and spend dollars in our local businesses, but our feasibility study also shows 62% of gaming revenue would originate from outside of Indiana if the casino were located here," he said.

Laughlin doesn't tie his support for a casino to Senate Enrolled Act 1. He said, however, that the additional tax money could be distributed to nonprofits, schools and first responders.

Gaming cellphone apps are probably a bigger threat to anyone inclined to gambling addiction than casinos are, he said, citing a gambling addiction rate of 3% of the population, a proportion he doesn't seem to view as excessive.

Laughlin said he has spoken to numerous commissioners, mayors and law enforcement agencies who told him crime didn't increase in their communities after a casino opened.

"I understand that moral objections exist, but there truly is not much reliable academic research that supports these claims," Laughlin said. "I also believe consenting adults should have the freedom to spend their entertainment dollars as they see fit. Legislating things like this is a slippery slope."

Concerned citizens

Casino supporters, including Borne and Haffner, have used the last several months to organize. They have raised money, although they won't say how much. They have created a website, plan to run TV ads and have received yard signs.

Opponents already have started placing their signs in yards. They describe themselves on the website as "a group of concerned citizens" and as "a grassroots coalition of neighbors, business owners and faith leaders," but they have shielded individual identities.

The homepage of the group's website features the image of a slot machine with a large red button inviting visitors to "spin" by clicking it. Three columns of phrases race upward, quickly replaced by others words written in black type.

Phrases say things including "good paying jobs," "neighborhood improvements," "revitalized infrastructure" – all things that casino supporters have promised would result from gaming being approved.

But the three phrases that stop in the middle section, the phrases shown in red print say: "human trafficking," "embezzlement" and "poverty." A red flashing light like one atop a police car shines above the slot machine when the "winning" phrases are revealed.

Will inland casino gambling be permitted in Allen County? Or Steuben? Or DeKalb? The voters will decide on Nov. 3.

sslater@jg.net

State Senator District 14

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

A two-term state senator faces a challenger in the election for the District 14 seat.

Sen. Tyler Johnson, a Republican, and Democrat Blaine Sefton are campaigning for the seat. The district includes part of Allen and DeKalb counties.

Johnson is a physician and Sefton, a first-time candidate, works as a union electrician. They were both unopposed in the primary election.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

Do you think Senate Enrolled Act 1 was a success? Do you think the tax cuts should be adjusted or reworked in the next session? Why or why not?

JOHNSON: SEA 1 succeeded at what it was built to do: curb levy growth. What it did not do is protect homeowners from runaway assessment growth. Local governments still raise tax bills through these unfettered assessed values. For most homeowners that is a tax on unrealized gains – paper wealth they have not cashed in.

SEA 1 barely touches the thing actually driving higher bills: trending AV. A homestead assessment growth cap would do more for real protection than another layer of supplemental deduction.

SEFTON: I don't think SEA 1 was a success. Families and educators who have started the 2026-27 school year have felt already the lack of support and funding from the states decision to address an affordability crisis by making working class families pay the difference for a tax structure that was at best short sighted and at worst a deliberate choice to hurt the average working tax payer.

The changes in SEA 1 should be reworked completely. Even in the state of Indiana we have some of the wealthiest companies that profit off the backs of everyday working class people who don't see any of that wealth coming to those who created it. As law makers it is our job to keep these corporations in check and ensure they pay their fair share.

What do you think is the most prominent issue or challenge that state lawmakers face?

JOHNSON: The toughest job in the Statehouse is not writing another appropriation. It is making sure each tax dollar is spent on a result.

Too much government spending is measured by how much went out the door, not by whether schools improved, roads lasted, or public safety got better. Lawmakers can pass a budget in a week. Getting value takes the harder work: clear goals, honest metrics, cutting what does not work, and refusing to confuse activity with achievement.

Taxpayers do not owe government more money. Government owes taxpayers proof that the money already collected is used well.

SEFTON: The state is facing the same affordability crisis the rest of the country is. Working class people are putting in more hours and more work than ever before, while getting none of the wealth accumulation they were promised by a generation of people who continue to call the shots. State lawmakers need to stand up for the working class families and refuse to be bought out by the corporations who wish to see us work to the bone.

Unfortunately for Hoosiers, we are controlled by a corrupt supermajority that would rather defend and enrich companies from Israel then to support local businesses and operations within our state borders. It all comes down to your background and integrity. With so many law makers bought out by big business, it is time to put working class people to represent working class families.

If elected, what are your top goals?

JOHNSON: I will keep showing up to do the work: level-headed service, no theatrics, and decisions I can explain in plain language. Authentic transparency means telling people what a bill costs, who it helps, and where I disagree. Hard work and conservative values are the standard I intend to keep: limited government, stewardship of tax dollars, and results measured by whether Hoosiers are better off.

SEFTON: My goals are to author and sponsor common sense legislation that supports working class families, laws that keeps corporations and the ultra-wealthy in check, and support programs that strengthens our state to ensure a future our children and families can be excited to build together.

As law makers we need to rein in bad landlords and private equity to ensure affordable housing. We need to raise the minimum wage and create programs to support unionization efforts. We need to ensure our local government and counties are fully funded to have the good roads and infrastructure we deserve. We need to stop the for-profit insurance and healthcare companies from screwing over struggling families. We need to listen to Hoosiers who want to freedom of legalized marijuana and use the taxes to support us.

Overall it is my goal to ensure a better future and life for working class people here in our wonderful state.

CANDIDATES

Tyler Johnson



Johnson

Age: 43
Home: Leo
Occupation: Physician
Political Experience: First elected as state senator in 2022

Blaine Sefton



Sefton

Age: 30
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Union electrician, LU 305
Political experience: First-time candidate

State Senator District 15

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

The founder of a home care business is challenging a longtime politician in the race for the District 15 State Senate seat.

Democrat Julie McGill and Sen. Liz Brown, a Republican, hope to represent the district that includes most of Allen County.

Brown, a former Fort Wayne City Councilwoman, has been a state senator for about 12 years. She defeated Darren Vogt with a lead of 14 votes, which led to her challenger requesting a recount. Vogt later canceled the request.

McGill is the founder of Family Solutions Home Care. The first-time candidate was unopposed in the primary election.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

Do you think Senate Enrolled Act 1 was a success? Do you think the tax cuts should be adjusted or reworked in the next session? Why or why not?

BROWN: Property taxes are an area we've worked on over the years and I feel we're in a better position now than when I first took office; we've passed laws specifically helping senior citizens, disabled vets and their families, addressing assessed values to result in lower property taxes and eliminating the personal property tax for many businesses. Indiana has the eighth-lowest median property taxes in the nation for homeowners.

The State of Indiana is living within its means; local governments and school districts need to as well. SEA 1 promoted much-needed transparency for taxpayers to understand how their local tax dollars are being spent, but honestly, more work needs to be done. Conversations are already happening at the Statehouse for what meaningful property tax relief could look like as we seek to give Hoosiers further relief.

MCGILL: No. SEA 1 did not deliver balanced property tax relief. A homeowner's new statewide credit is capped at $300. Meanwhile, the business personal property exemption jumped from $80,000 to $2 million, and new equipment is no longer subject to the 30% minimum valuation floor.

Schools, police, fire departments, roads, libraries, and other local services all cost money to run. That money has to come from somewhere. When corporations pay less, homeowners end up paying more to cover the difference. The bill doesn't go away. It just gets handed to someone else.

I would rework SEA 1 to deliver meaningful protection for homeowners, especially seniors and working families struggling with rising assessments, while keeping sensible relief for actual small businesses. Real reform should lower the overall burden, not quietly shift it to local communities.

What do you think is the most prominent issue or challenge that state lawmakers face?

BROWN: Keeping Indiana affordable: I will continue to advocate for zero-based state budgets, cutting budgets before raising taxes, fiscal restraint, free market principles and limited government.

MCGILL: The most prominent issue lawmakers face is tackling affordability, and it's the thread running through everything. Property taxes, healthcare, childcare, housing, and whether basic services actually work when people need them.

Indiana keeps a healthy reserve, and that matters. But a reserve isn't the goal. It's a tool. When schools, infrastructure, and public safety are struggling while tax dollars sit unused, that isn't fiscal responsibility. That's a failure of priorities.

Real fiscal responsibility means using what we have wisely, including maximizing federal matching dollars that bring real money back into Indiana communities instead of turning it down.

The hardest job for lawmakers isn't saving money. It's proving that money is actually working for the families who need it.

If elected, what are your top goals?

BROWN: For four consecutive years I've passed a health care reform bill, and I will do that again next year to lower costs, improve care and increase transparency in health care.

I will reintroduce my biological truth bill that would make the definitions of "male" and "female" consistent in Indiana code; this bill passed the Indiana Senate with strong support but stalled in the House.

Finally, this year I had a proposal to make the social security tax break in the big federal tax bill applicable on the state level to give additional tax relief to seniors; I will work on that policy again next year.

MCGILL: My top priority is affordability. That means fixing SEA 1 so relief actually reaches homeowners instead of corporations, bringing real transparency to utility rate hikes, and expanding access to affordable healthcare and childcare so families aren't choosing between them and rent.

Second, I want to fix what's actually broken. Thousands of Hoosiers with disabilities are stuck on a Medicaid waiver waitlist for a year or longer. That would be my first priority in office, alongside closing the coverage gaps in the Healthy Indiana Plan and cutting the red tape that makes basic services harder to access than they should be.

Third, I want a government that actually answers to the people paying for it. That means regular town halls in District 15, real transparency about how and why I vote, and requiring that every economic development deal prove it delivers real jobs before Hoosiers foot the bill.

District 15 deserves a senator who shows up, tells the truth, and treats every tax dollar like it belongs to someone who worked hard for it.

CANDIDATES

Liz Brown



Brown

Age (as of Nov. 3): 67
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Mediator
Political experience: Fort Wayne City Council (2008-2012) and Indiana Senate District 15 (2015-current)

Julie McGill



McGill

Age: 40
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Founder of Family Solutions Home Care
Political Experience: First-time candidate

State Senator District 19

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

Two candidates hope to land in the State Senate District 19 seat after their first runs for the legislature.

Republican Blake Fiechter, a Bluffton City Council member, and Democrat Timothy Murphy, an activist and pastor, are vying for the seat that represents part of Allen County, along with Wells, Adams, Blackford and Jay counties.

In the Republican primary, Fiechter defeated Travis Holdman, who had represented the district for 18 years.

Murphy was unopposed in the primary.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

Do you think Senate Enrolled Act 1 was a success? Do you think the tax cuts should be adjusted or reworked in the next session? Why or why not?

FIECHTER: I believe SEA-1 was a bill with good intentions, but it fell far short of providing meaningful relief to Hoosiers. Very few property owners saw savings, while local communities have been left trying to make up the difference through difficult budget decisions and creating new taxes. As a Council Member I am still trying to figure out where the tax savings went, seeing that not many saw reductions but local communities are seeing the cuts.

At the very least, SEA-1 needs to be reworked. Property tax reform does not have to be overly complicated. If we want to provide real relief to Hoosiers, we need to start by looking at the state's own spending. The state should lead by example and identify meaningful opportunities to reduce its budget before asking small rural communities, cities, counties, Police, Fire, EMS, and even Schools to make cuts to essential services.

SEA-1 is now putting cities against their own counties and local governments against one another, forcing communities to find new ways to replace revenue they can no longer collect.

MURPHY: SEA 1 is already harming local communities, and it will only get worse with each budget year as its effects on funding for local government programs like EMS, firefighters, public schools, and more grow. It puts pressure on municipalities to raise money elsewhere to cover these gaps or otherwise cut services. SEA 1 needs adjusting at the next available opportunity. It is having a disproportionate impact on small towns and communities while giving excessive tax breaks to large businesses. We can do better.

What do you think is the most prominent issue or challenge that state lawmakers face?

FIECHTER: I think we need to have state lawmakers that are active and involved in their local communities and with the constituents that they represent. When lawmakers can sit at the table and have conversations, they can quickly realize the effects that some of the laws they are passing have. Just like SEA-1, if lawmakers would have sat down with Mayors, Commissioners, Council Members, Fire and Police Chiefs, School superintendents, and other stakeholders they would have likely realized they needed to revise it before they even passed it.

MURPHY: The cost of living is hurting most Hoosiers, including the cost of healthcare and the needs of families for affordable childcare. As a starting point, we need to make healthcare costs more transparent, work to lower medical costs, and create reforms to medical debt. There are too many restrictions and red tape requirements that needlessly complexify access to programs like Medicaid, which have been made worse by Republicans in Indianapolis. Concerning childcare, funding has been cut at the exact time when access needs to be expanded. Every family in every county in Indiana should be able to access quality, affordable childcare, and the state should expand programs to do so.

If elected, what are your top goals?

FIECHTER: I want to reduce government and cut the state budget where we can find reasonable means to do so. I believe fresh eyes can find areas that potentially have been overlooked for budget cuts over the years. If the state can do so then Hoosiers will start to finally see and feel relief at the gas pump, when paying utilities, buying groceries, and in property taxes. Being in real estate I have fought for property tax reform for many years and that will always remain a top goal, along with making sure our small rural communities have the support they need to continue to be able to grow and thrive. We have to make sure our small communities continue to have access to healthcare, workforce development, and continue to be respected at the state level.

MURPHY: Indiana's state legislatures are not representative on account of partisan gerrymandering. While there is a majority of Hoosiers that would support certain policies, their will is thwarted by unrepresentative political bodies. To offset this current flaw in our system, I would push for citizen ballot initiatives, where Hoosiers would be able to place items up for a vote if they are able to convince enough of their neighbors to support such an effort. This would allow for an up-or-down vote on things like raising the minimum wage, loosening the current near-prohibition on reproductive access, or making it easier to form a union. We should expect Republican majorities in both state legislatures in the near term, but that shouldn't mean that we can't see progress on policy issues where a majority of Hoosiers agree. Citizen ballot initiatives would make that possible.

CANDIDATES

Blake Fiechter



Fiechter

Age (as of Nov. 3): 37
Home: Bluffton
Occupation: Real estate and small business owner
Political experience: Bluffton City Council member at large

Timothy Murphy



Murphy

Age (as of Nov. 3): 44
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Pastor
Political experience: long-time activist, first-time candidate

State Representative District 81

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

A Fort Wayne project manager is challenging a longtime state representative of nearly 14 years.

Democrat Sharon Wight and State Rep. Martin Carbaugh, a Republican, are campaigning for the District 81, which includes northwest Allen County.

Carbaugh defeated David Mervar in the primary for the Republican nomination.

Wight won the Democratic nomination over Chad Clevidence in the primary election.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette.

Carbaugh did not submit responses. Wight's answers are below.

Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

Do you think Senate Enrolled Act 1 was a success? Do you think the tax cuts should be adjusted or reworked in the next session? Why or why not?

SEA1's impacts are being felt across the state. It did not go far enough to protect homeowners, especially those on fixed or low incomes: a $400,000 home sees only a $300 tax cut, while a business owning the same in property saw a $12,000 decrease. Meanwhile, the state holds a $1.86 billion surplus – up 174% from last year – not being spent on services for Hoosiers, schools are turning to referendums that cost time and money to promote, and local governments are being warned they won't be able to serve their communities as effectively once these cuts fully phase in.

This summer showed why that matters. Statewide flooding hit Hoosiers hard – the White River crested at record highs in Anderson and Noblesville, breaking marks that had stood since 1913. That damage fell on infrastructure funded by budgets already strained by SEA1. It may not have hindered this year's response, but further severe weather will start to show the strain on those budgets statewide. It needs to be reworked in the upcoming session.

What do you think is the most prominent issue or challenge that state lawmakers face?

The biggest issue facing my district specifically is rapid development in parts of the district while others still need support and maintenance. The need to support and maintain infrastructure is mirrored throughout the state, especially evidenced in Gary, Muncie, Anderson and other areas during this summer's flooding. Specific to District 81, Huntertown is rapidly growing and has its own water source for utilities, and that water source was not meant to support the number of individuals it does currently.

At the same time, roads and infrastructure need maintained in the developed areas of my district as this growth takes place. Additionally, we have critical needs throughout the state for public transportation infrastructure, and walkable sidewalks. This limits constituents who do not own vehicles in their ability to take part in the community. Finally, we need to ensure that new housing, especially those intended as rental properties, are built in a way that addresses accessibility.

If elected, what are your top goals?

Long term, improving accessibility throughout our state, particularly related to development and public transportation. Housing that is built with the intention for rental properties should be held to a higher standard that would allow anyone to live there, or developers with that intention should have a written plan in place to address those concerns as they arise with a commitment to doing so. I want to see an improvement in public transportation, both in amount offered and accessibility of it in metropolitan areas.

Second, development of a system that ensures all of our residents have healthcare that does not put them into bankruptcy, while also giving them the care they need. We need a system that serves patients and does not cause unnecessary back-ups in paperwork for doctors that result in delayed care. Other states, such as Massachusetts, have models in place that can be developed at the state level to provide healthcare for residents rather than staying reliant on what happens at the federal level.

CANDIDATE

Sharon Wight

Age (as of Nov. 3): 39
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Project manager
Political experience: First-time candidate



Wight

EARLY VOTING

Many residents will cast their votes before Election Day through early voting.

In Allen County, polls in the lobby of the Rousseau Centre, 1 E. Main St., Fort Wayne, will be open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays through Friday.

Other polls will open as Election Day nears.

The Rousseau Centre and Ivy Tech Coliseum Campus will be open for voters 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Oct. 24.

Along with the Rousseau Centre, the following locations will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Oct. 26-30 and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 31:

- Christ's Community Church, 10616 Liberty Mills Road;
- Firehouse Reception Hall, 3322 Honway Court;
- Grace Point Church, 8611 Mayhew Road;
- Ivy Tech Coliseum Campus, 3800 N. Anthony Blvd., Door 50;
- Public Safety Academy, 7602 Patriot Crossing; and
- Resurrection Lutheran Church, 14318 Lima Road.

The Rousseau Centre will also be open 8 a.m. to noon Nov. 2.

Polls will be open at more than 50 Allen County vote centers from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 3. More information about Election Day voting in Allen County is online at https://www.allencounty.in.gov/938/Election-Day-Vote-Centers.

For more information about how to vote across northeast Indiana, go online to indianavoters.

State Representative District 83

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

A real estate broker is running against an incumbent for the Indiana House District 83 seat.

Democrat Wesley Haffenden and State Rep. Chris Judy are campaigning for the position. Judy has held the seat for nearly 12 years.

This is Haffenden's first political run.

The district includes parts of Allen and Whitley counties, extending slightly into Kosciusko and Wabash counties.

Judy and Haffenden were both unopposed in the primary election.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette. Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

Do you think Senate Enrolled Act 1 was a success? Do you think the tax cuts should be adjusted or reworked in the next session? Why or why not?

HAFFENDEN: I support reducing taxes for working Hoosiers. People who work, raise families and are trying to get ahead should not be struggling in Indiana.

But I believe SEA 1 was badly written. It did not adequately account for how property tax reductions affect local governments' ability to fund services like schools, police, fire departments and roads.

The bill also included provisions that disproportionally benefited large businesses.

Indiana's property tax system, and our tax system more broadly, need a serious rewrite. Tax relief should prioritize working class Hoosiers, while ensuring local communities have the resources to provide the services people depend on.

We must lower taxes for Hoosiers and cut the corporate welfare that always seems to be snuck into legislation.

JUDY: Yes, and the results in this district bear it out. I voted for SEA 1. Sixty percent of Allen County homeowners and 68% of Whitley County homeowners paid less in property taxes in 2026 than in 2025. The new supplemental homestead credit delivered $23.1 million in direct savings in Allen County and $1.7 million in Whitley, part of $351 million statewide. Across Indiana, 56.8% of homeowners saw an actual decrease.

Should it be adjusted? Yes, and I'm open to going further. The homestead deductions phase in through 2031, so most of this relief is still arriving. If there's room to accelerate that schedule or add to it, I want to look at it.

What I won't do is guess at the number. HEA 1210 delayed the local income tax changes a year and created the Municipal Unit Strategic Taskforces. Those reports are due to the Department of Local Government Finance by Dec. 1, as we convene. County results vary widely, driven by local debt, referenda and assessment growth. Get that picture, then relieve more.

What do you think is the most prominent issue or challenge that state lawmakers face?

HAFFENDEN: The biggest challenge is the rising cost of simply living here. Wages have not kept up with the cost of housing, health care, child care, utilities and everyday life.

Indiana has spent years asking how we can make the state more attractive to businesses and has given corporations sweetheart deal after sweetheart deal.

It's time we make the state more affordable for the folks living here and stop the corporate handouts.

The statehouse needs to focus on lowering costs and raising wages, while making sure our schools, roads and local communities have the resources they need.

Government should work for the people who live and work here, not just the corporations looking to use our land and resources.

JUDY: Crafting the next two-year budget. It's the number one priority, and everything else in 2027 runs through it.

Roads are the most immediate piece. The gas tax suspension has given Hoosiers the cheapest gasoline in America – $3.45 a gallon against a $4.14 national average. But INDOT projects it will cost state and local road programs a combined $1.1 billion if it continues through early December. The governor has covered local losses out of the State Highway Fund. Tapping the state's cash reserves requires legislative approval, and that decision lands on the General Assembly in January.

We're in a position to make it. Sound fiscal discipline built reserves projected to reach $5.2 billion by next summer, and that discipline is exactly what gave the governor room to suspend the tax at all. A state that hadn't done that work would be choosing between pump prices and paving.

The harder question is what month-to-month reimbursement doesn't answer. Indiana needs a durable long-term road funding model.

If elected, what are your top goals?

HAFFENDEN: Legal weed, living wages, passing a data center moratorium, and getting Flock surveillance out of our state.

To expand on that, my platform is built around three things: Dignity, Accountability and Freedom.

Dignity means making sure Hoosiers can afford a dignified life: raising wages, paying teachers a professional salary, expanding health care, and lowering the cost of utilities and other essentials.

Accountability means making corporations and government answer to the people they serve. That means ending corporate welfare, holding developments like data centers accountable to the communities they impact, supporting term limits, and getting big money out of politics.

Freedom means protecting Hoosiers' right to live their lives without government intrusion. That includes legalizing marijuana, getting mass surveillance technology like Flock out of our state and ending the culture war distractions that divide us instead of solving the problems people actually face.

JUDY: The budget comes first. I'm on Ways and Means, and in a long session that's the job – funding public safety and K-12, backfilling road money, and writing a budget that holds up in year two.

Second, licensure pathways for military medical personnel. I was a combat medic in Iraq. Indiana is short of nurses, physician assistants and therapists while service members here already hold that training and can't practice, because our statutes recognize only civilian education routes. My bill never got a hearing in 2026. I'm bringing it back.

Third, data center tax policy. I support building this capacity in Indiana – I&M customers in my district just saw a 3.6% rate decrease attributed to that load growth. But the 2019 sales-tax exemption courted an industry that now comes to us, and local abatements come out of the revenue that funds schools and public safety.

Fourth, the state police supplemental pension bill, which I'm authoring after it stalled in 2026.

I've also drafted bills on license plate reader accountability and post-quantum readiness for state systems.

CANDIDATES

Wesley Haffenden



Haffenden

Age (as of Nov. 3): 36
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Real estate broker
Political Experience: First-time candidate

Chris Judy



Judy

Age (as of Nov. 3): 48
Home: Fort Wayne (Aboite Township)
Occupation: Business development, TJ Nowak Supply Co.; licensed life and health insurance broker with Tradewell Tax and Financial; Iraq War veteran
• **Political experience:** State Representative, House District 83, since 2015.

State Representative District 84

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

A local small business owner is challenging the state legislator who has represented District 84 in the Indiana House for about 16 years.

Democrat Misti Meehan is campaigning to take over State Rep. Bob Morris' seat. The district represents a northern portion of Allen County.

Meehan is the former chair of the Allen County Democratic Party.

Meehan and Morris were both unopposed in the primary.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette.

Morris did not submit responses. Meehan's answers are below.

Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

Do you think Senate Enrolled Act 1 was a success? Do you think the tax cuts should be adjusted or reworked in the next session? Why or why not?

I would not call Senate Enrolled Act 1 an unqualified success. Hoosiers absolutely needed property tax relief, and the law did lower taxes for many homeowners. But tax relief should not simply shift costs elsewhere or leave communities struggling to fund schools, public safety, roads, libraries, and other essential services.

I believe the General Assembly should revisit the law next session using the actual results from its implementation. We should look at who received meaningful relief, where burdens may have shifted, and what the changes have meant for local governments and taxpayers.

My goal would be targeted, sustainable property tax relief, particularly for seniors, people on fixed incomes, and working families, while making sure communities can continue providing the services residents depend on. Property tax reform should make Indiana more affordable without creating a new problem somewhere else.

CANDIDATE

Misti Meehan



Meehan

Age (as of Nov. 3): 49
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Small business owner
Political experience: Ran for Fort Wayne City Council District 1 in 2019; former Allen County Democratic Party Chair

What do you think is the most prominent issue or challenge that state lawmakers face?

The most prominent challenge facing state lawmakers is affordability. Too many Hoosiers are working hard and still watching the cost of housing, utilities, health care, child care, groceries, and transportation consume more of their household budgets.

State government cannot control every price, but lawmakers do make decisions that affect many of those costs. We should be asking whether every major piece of legislation makes it easier or harder for ordinary Hoosiers to build a stable life here.

That means strengthening oversight and accountability where state policy affects household costs, investing in affordable child care and housing, protecting access to health care, supporting good-paying jobs, and making sure tax policy actually delivers meaningful relief. Indiana should be a state where one full-time job provides a realistic path to housing, stability and opportunity.

If elected, what are your top goals?

My top goals are lowering everyday costs, strengthening public education, and making state government work better for the people it serves.

I want greater accountability around the costs Hoosiers cannot easily avoid, including utilities, housing, healthcare, and childcare. I want Indiana to fully support its public schools, expand access to affordable early childhood education, and make sure educators have the resources they need to serve students.

I also want to protect health care access, support good-paying jobs, and protect fair, accessible elections because elections are the gatekeepers of every other change we hope to make.

Most of all, I want to bring a practical, community-first approach to the Statehouse. I am not interested in politics for its own sake. I want to solve problems, listen to the people affected by our decisions, and ensure the state government is actually helping Hoosiers build stable, affordable lives.

State Representative District 85

THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

An experienced candidate hopes to secure the Indiana House District 85 seat over a longtime incumbent.

Democrat Mark Wehrle is challenging State Rep. Dave Heine for the district that includes the east and south sides of Allen County.

Heine and Wehrle were both unopposed in the primary election.

Candidates for local contested races were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire provided by The Journal Gazette.

Heine did not submit responses. Wehrle's answers are below.

Answers have been edited for clarity and to meet length requirements.

Do you think Senate Enrolled Act 1 was a success? Do you think the tax cuts should be adjusted or reworked in the next session? Why or why not?

SEA 1 was anything but a success for Hoosiers. Our Republican majority has once again rewarded their voters with tax breaks for the wealthy, while they continue to remove safety nets for low income families. We need to re-work tax cuts so that our Hoosiers have access to affordable health care, food, housing and the green energy credits. We need to fully fund schools and not the masked ICE agents.

What do you think is the most prominent issue or challenge that state lawmakers face?

The biggest issue to address is affordability. Let's help Hoosiers feed their families, pay for healthcare, housing, gas and improve their quality of life.

If elected, what are your top goals?

Other than affordability and green energy, it's important to inform voters about the stark difference between the two major party's platforms. I want voters to ponder which party platform most fits their values. Do you love thy neighbor? Or fear/hate? Shouldn't we, the USA, return to being the champion for human rights and fair elections? Let's regain our world's respect as a beacon of hope and protect freedom, liberty and rights.

This is the year to vote for Democrats.

CANDIDATE

Mark Wehrle



Wehrle

Age (as of Nov. 3): 67
Home: Fort Wayne
Occupation: Retired business professional
Political Experience: Ran for 4th District U.S. House in 1998; 84th District Indiana House in 2002, 2006, 2008

2026 ELECTION GUIDE: BALLOTS

Nov. 3 is Election Day in Indiana. Polls open at 6 a.m. and close at 6 p.m. Northeast Indiana voters will elect U.S. and state legislators, county officials, judges and members of town councils and school boards. The following are ballots northeast Indiana voters will see when they go to the polls. Candidates are listed in alphabetical order. Township races are not included.

An asterisk denotes an incumbent.

Write-in candidates, whose names do not appear on election ballots, are U.S. Representative District 3 candidate Phillip D. Beachy (Independent) and Secretary of State candidate Andrew Delano (National Socialist American Workers).

ADAMS COUNTY

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Senator
District 19
Blake Fiechter (R)
Timothy C. Murphy (D)
Representative
District 79
*Matthew D. Lehman (R)
Ian G. Richardson (D)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
Shall Judge Dana J. Kenworthy be retained in office?
Fourth District
Shall Judge Mary A. DeBoer be retained in office?
Fifth District
Shall Judge Paul A. Felix be retained in office?
Indiana Tax Court
Shall Judge Justin L. McAdam be retained in office?

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Currently, under the Constitution of the State of Indiana, a person charged with murder or treason is not entitled to be released on bail if the proof is evident or the presumption strong. Shall the Constitution of the State of Indiana be amended to provide that a person charged with an offense other than murder or treason is not entitled to bail if: (1) the proof is evident or the presumption strong; and (2) the state proves by clear and convincing evidence that no release conditions will reasonably protect the safety of any other person or the community. (This question concerns Article 1, Section 17 of the Constitution of the State of Indiana.)

Shall the Constitution of the State of Indiana be amended to permit the judge of a city or town court to reside in: (1) the county in which the court is located; or (2) the bordering county closest to the city or town in which the court is located? (This question concerns Article 6, Section 6 of the Constitution of the State of Indiana.)

COUNTY

Superior Court judge
*Sam Conrad (R)
Prosecutor
Julie-Marie Brown (R)
Clerk
*Shelly M. Brite (R)
Sheriff
Eric Beer (R)
Surveyor
*Mike Werling (R)
Assessor
*Mary Beery (R)
Commissioner
District 2
*Steven R. Bailey (R)
Council
District 1
*Fred Velez (R)
District 2
*Leonard Corral, Jr. (R)
District 3
*Cory Sprunger (R)
District 4
*Robert E. (Bob) Rhoades (R)

GENEVA

Town Council
District 2
*Agnes Schoch (R)
District 3
*Andrew J. Briggs (D)

SCHOOLS

Adams Central
District 3
Andy Hackenjos (R)
District 4
Madison R. Bailey
North Adams
District 1
*Dave Hill
District 2
*Michelle Stimpson
South Adams
District 1
*Landon Patterson (I)
Benjamin Rediger (R)
District 3
*Mitch Sprunger
*Adam S. Lehman (R)

ALLEN COUNTY

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Senator
District 14
*Tyler Johnson (R)
Blaine Sefton (D)
District 15
*Liz Brown (R)
Julie McGill (D)
District 19
Blake Fiechter (R)
Timothy C. Murphy (D)
Representative
District 80
*Phil GiaQuinta (D)
District 81
*Martin Carbaugh (R)
Sharon L. Wight (D)
District 82
*Kyle Miller (D)
District 83
Wesley Haffenden (D)
*Christopher Judy (R)
District 84
*Bob Morris (R)
Misti Meehan (D)
District 85
*Dave Heine (R)
Mark (Bird) Wehrle

JUDICIAL RETENTION

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Shall inland casino gambling be permitted in Allen County?

COUNTY

Prosecutor
Tesa Helge (R)
Clerk
Toshua Manuel (R)
Keri Roby (D)
Auditor
Nikole Gillum (D)
*Jacquelynn Scheuman (R)
Recorder
*Nicole Keesling (R)
Cheyenne Stoppenhagen (D)
Sheriff
*Troy R. Hershberger (R)
Assessor
*Stacey O'Day (R)
Commissioner
District 2
Kate Conner (D)
Ozzie Mitson (R)
District 3
Jorge Fernandez (D)
Paul Moss (R)
Council
District 1
Mike Clendenen (R)
Melissa Fisher (D)
District 2
Mark Hagar (R)
District 3
Eric (ET) Tippmann (R)
Stacey Freeman (D)
District 4
Lee Castillo (R)
*Don Wyss (D)

GRABILL

Council
*Claude E. Schrock (R)
Superior Court
(Non-partisan)
Civil No. 2
*Craig J. Bobay
Civil No. 3
*Jennifer L. DeGroote
Criminal No. 5
Christina Gull
Samuel L. Keirns
Jesus (Rick) Trevino
Criminal No. 6
*David M. Zent
Family Relations No. 7
*Brent A. Ecenbarger

HUNTERTOWN

Clerk-Treasurer
*Ryan Schwab (R)
Council
(Vote for 5)
*Michael J. Aker (R)
Lee Bradley (R)
*Tina D. McDonald (R)
Tony Ramey (R)
Andrew Roberts (D)
*Brandon Seifert (R)
Kyle Quandt (D)

LEO-CEDARVILLE

Council
(Vote for 3)
*Rob Reece (R)
Ryan Walls (R)
*Scott Yoder (R)

ZANESVILLE

Clerk-Treasurer
*Tara Bowersock (R)
Council
(Vote for 2)
Cody Mulholland (R)
*Issac Zent (R)

SCHOOLS

East Allen
District 1R
*Timothy E. Hines (R)
District 2E
Joni Price (R)
*Beth A. Wood
District 3E
*Pamela G. Dukes (R)
Fort Wayne Community
At large
(Vote for 2)
Matthew J. Crummey (AS)
Lee J. Daly (I)
Giovanna Follo
Brandon Foster (I)
Joe Jordan
*Noah Smith
District 1
*Julia (Julie) Hollingsworth
Jeanette Rose Jaquish (L)
District 4
*Antonette Louise Payne
Northwest Allen
At large
(Vote for 2)
*Elizabeth Hathaway (R)
*Darren Vogt (R)
District 3
*Kristi Schlatter
Southwest Allen
At large
(Vote for 2)
*Kimberly Moppert (R)
*Stephanie Veit (R)

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DEKALB COUNTY

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Senator
District 14
*Tyler Johnson (R)
Blaine Sefton (D)
Representative
District 52
*Ben Smaltz (R)
Joseph Trost (D)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
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Fourth District
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Shall inland casino gambling be permitted in DeKalb County?

COUNTY

Superior Court
No. 1
*Adam C. Squiller (R)
Prosecutor:
*Neal R. Blythe (R)
Auditor
Holly A. Albright (R)
Sheriff
*Brady Thomas (R)
Coroner
*Jennie Short (R)
Assessor
*Sheila Stonebraker (R)
Commissioner
District West
*Terry Yarde (R)
Council
District 1
*Chris Krafft (R)
District 2
Chris (The Ref) Refner (D)
Darin Yarian (R)
District 3
Brent Warfield (R)
Bobby York (D)
District 4
Natalie DeWitt (R)

HAMILTON

Council
District 1
Larry F. Bowers (D)
Richard (Rick) Long (R)

WATERLOO

Council
At large
(Vote for 2)
Randy D. Bice (R)
*Trevor Wright (R)

SCHOOLS

DeKalb Central
At large
Lauren Anderson (R)
Grant/Richland
Tim Haynes
DeKalb Eastern
Butler/Wilmington
At large
*Sherri Strock
Concord/Newville/
Spencer/Stafford/Troy
At large
*Richard D. Musser (R)
Wilmington
At large
Bryce Yoder
DeKalb Garrett/Keyser/Butler
At large
*Luke Christopher Ice
Steven James Kelham
City of Garrett
Travis Lee Gaar
Brianne D. Haiflich
Cherrie L. B. Wells
Hamilton
At large
*April Holden
District 1
*Brandy Shirley DePriest
District 3
Jamy Merritt

HUNTINGTON COUNTY

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Senator
District 17
Chris Parker (R)
Cynthia M. Wehr (D)
Representative
District 50
Pepper Snyder (D)
*Lorissa C. Sweet (R)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
Shall Judge Dana J. Kenworthy be retained in office?
Fourth District
Shall Judge Mary A. DeBoer be retained in office?
Fifth District
Shall Judge Paul A. Felix be retained in office?
Indiana Tax Court
Shall Judge Justin L. McAdam be retained in office?

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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Shall the Constitution of the State of Indiana be amended to permit the judge of a city or town court to reside in: (1) the county in which the court is located; or (2) the bordering county closest to the city or town in which the court is located? (This question concerns Article 6, Section 6 of the Constitution of the State of Indiana.)

COUNTY

Clerk
Kristina L. (Kris) Bickel (R)
Auditor
Julie Newsome (R)
Recorder
Shelley Malone Septer (R)
Sheriff
Chad Hammel (R)
Assessor
Jill E. Amick-Zorger (R)
Commissioner
District 1
Olivia Eckert (D)
Jodi Stouder (R)
Council
District 1
Megan Bonbrake (D)
*John Stoeckley (R)
District 2
*Kendall Mickley (R)
District 3
Todd Landrum (R)
District 4
Dave Holland (D)
*Brian L. Warpup (R)

MARKLE

Council
*Blake A. Caley (R)

ROANOKE

Council
(Vote for 2)
*Brian E. Humphries (I)
*Amanda Sans (I)

WARREN

Council
(Vote for 2)
*Scott Canady (I)
Taylor Randall (I)
Michael L. Yoder (I)

SCHOOLS

Huntington
District 2
*Debra Miller (R)
District 3
James Garwood (I)
Carrie M. Miller (R)
*Ken Thompson (R)
District 5
*Gary Lynn McClellan

KOSCIUSKO COUNTY

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 2
Jamee Decio (D)
William Eric Henry (L)
*Rudy Yakym (R)
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Representative
District 18
*David H. Abbott (R)
District 22
*Craig Snow (R)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
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Shall the Constitution of the State of Indiana be

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amended to permit the judge of a city or town court to reside in: (1) the county in which the court is located; or (2) the bordering county closest to the city or town in which the court is located? (This question concerns Article 6, Section 6 of the Constitution of the State of Indiana.)

COUNTY

Superior Court
No. 1
*Karin McGrath (R)
No. 2
*Torrey J. Bauer (R)
No. 3
*Chad M. Miner (R)
No. 4
*Christopher Douglas Kehler (R)
Prosecutor
*J. Brad Voelz (R)
Auditor
*Alyssa Jo Schmucker (R)
Recorder
*Deborah A. (Deb) Wright (R)
Sheriff
*James M. (Jim) Smith (R)
Assessor
Bobbi J. Burkhart (R)
Commissioner
Southern District
Donald Wiesehan, Jr. (R)
Council
District 1
*Kimberly Cates (R)
District 2
*Joseph G. Irwin (R)
District 3
*Anthony W. (Tony) Ciriello (R)
Tina Holloway (D)
District 4
*David A. Wolkins (R)

MILFORD

Clerk-Treasurer
*Patricia Gall (R)
Council
(Vote for 3)
*Kenneth L. Long (R)
*Douglas Ruch (R)
*James A. Smiley (R)

SYRACUSE

Council
At large
(Vote for 2)
Gregory Scott Abbs (R)
Matthew Goodnight (R)
Yesenia (Jessie) Vetor (D)

WINONA LAKE

Council
District 3
Jim LeMasters (R)
District 5
*Jason Zaugg (R)

SCHOOLS

Tippecanoe Valley
District 3
Shelly E. Engle
Jamie Murphy
Joe Leon Secrist
District 4
*Tom Bauters (R)
Warsaw
District 1
Heather Michelle Helton (L)
*Tom Westerhof (R)
District 2
*Heather Reichenbach (R)
District 5
*Denny Duncan (R)
District 7
Ryan Parker (R)
Benjamin Rice (R)
Wawasee
District 1
*Neil Likens
District 2
Kim H. Nguyen
Jason J. Ughetti (R)
District 3
*Beth Beer (R)
Triton
District 1
*Teresa Lynn Barnhart
District 2
Steven D. Stichter
District 4
Austin Davis
Wa-Nee
Locke Township
*Curt Flickinger (R)
Union Township
*Trevor Hershberger (R)
Whitko
District 4
*Deb Thomas (R)
District 5
*Scott Werstler (R)

LAGRANGE COUNTY

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Representative
District 51
*Tony Isa (R)
Judy Rowe (D)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
Shall Judge Dana J. Kenworthy be retained in office?
Fourth District
Shall Judge Mary A. DeBoer be retained in office?
Fifth District
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COUNTY

Assessor
*Kim Fairchild (R)
Auditor
Jamesi F. Lemon (R)
Superior Court
Judge
*Lisa M. Bowen-Slaven (R)
Sheriff
*Tracy Harker (R)
Surveyor
*Zachary Lee Holsinger (R)
Prosecutor
*Travis J. Glick (R)
Commissioner
District 1
Jeffrey A. Campos (R)
Tom Swihart (D)
Council
District 1
Terry Martin (R)
Mark Ulrich (D)
District 2
Lyle E. Miller (R)
Joseph Wanderlust (L)
District 3
*Harold D. Gingerich (R)
District 4
Jay Benak (D)
Cory W. Stewart (I)
*James R. Young (R)

LAGRANGE

Council
Ward 4
Kim Randol (D)
*Josh Shotzman (R)
Ward 5
Edna Bowser (D)

SHIPSHEWANA

Council
District 1
*Timothy J. Moon (R)

TOPEKA

Council
At large
Eric Dunithan (R)

WOLCOTTVILLE

Council
At large
(Vote for 2)
Madaline Hart (R)
Jerry J. Raber (R)
Jeffrey Sorg (D)

SCHOOLS

Lakeland
District 1
Kari Cossairt
Charles (Bill) Park (R)
District 2
Robert Bond (R)
District 4
Ben Brown (R)
Prairie Heights
Milford
Steven M. Ceaglske (R)
Jordan R. Henschen (R)
William (Bill) Morr
Kenneth C. (Ken) Sheets (R)
Millgrove
Harmonee Laura McCrea (R)
*Jesslyn D. Senecal
Westview
Newbury
*Keith D. Lambright (R)
Van Buren
Chadwick E. Bender (I)

NOBLE COUNTY

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Representative
District 18
*David H. Abbott (R)
District 52
*Ben Smaltz (R)
Joseph Trost (D)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
Shall Judge Dana J. Kenworthy be retained in office?
Fourth District
Shall Judge Mary A. DeBoer be retained in office?
Fifth District
Shall Judge Paul A. Felix be retained in office?
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Shall Judge Justin L. McAdam be retained in office?

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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Shall Smith-Green Community Schools continue to increase property taxes paid to the School Corporation for no more than eight (8) years for the purpose of funding and sustaining educational and operational stability in response to reductions in property tax revenue, maintaining health and safety initiatives, supporting and retaining teachers and staff, maintaining class sizes and transportation services, and funding academic and support programs to meet the educational needs of all students, while changing the current maximum operating referendum tax rate of *0.6280, by imposing a property tax rate that does not exceed *0.4988 and

More ballots, Page 29

results in a maximum annual amount that does not exceed *2,176,300? If this operating referendum public question is NOT approved by the voters, for a median residence of *200,000, the property's annual tax bill would decrease by *431 per year. If this operating referendum public question is approved by the voters, it would be a renewal of the most recent operating referendum public question passed in 2018 with a property tax rate of *0.6280.

COUNTY

Circuit Court
Christopher T. Jansen (R)
Superior Court
No. 2
*Steven Hagen (R)
Prosecutor
*James B. (Jim) Mowery (R)
Everett Newman (D)
Auditor
Nicole Noe (R)
Recorder
*Tonya L. Jones (R)
Sheriff
Shane Coney (R)
Assessor
*Ben Castle (R)
Commissioner
District 1
John H. Metzger (R)
Council
District 1
*Tom Janes (R)
District 2
*Trey A. Forbes (R)
District 3
*Brandon Joshua Chordas (R)
District 4
Joe Sells (R)

ALBION

Council
(Vote for 2)
*Abby Lindsey (R)
*Vicki E. Jellison (R)

AVILLA

Council
Michael Hensinger (R)

CROMWELL

Council
Mark Bower (R)

WOLCOTTVILLE

Council
At large
(Vote for 2)
Madaline Hart (R)
Jerry J. Raber (R)
*Jeffrey Sorg (D)

SCHOOLS

Central Noble
At large
Bernie Lawson (R)
Andrew McGill (R)
Albion Township
*Lisa Anglin
Dalton Jellison
Noble Township
Heather Thompson
East Noble
At large
Dwight A. Miller (R)
Allen Township
Crystal Walkup (R)
Kendallville
Jessica Taylor (R)
Wayne Township
Ronnie Stanley (R)
Lakeland
District 1
Kari Cossairt
Charles (Bill) park (R)
District 2
Robert Bond (R)
District 4
Ben Brown (R)
Smith-Green
At large
Marcus B. Elam (I)
David Schafer (R)
*Kassie Taksey (R)
West Noble
At large
*Jeremy Brown (R)
District 1
*Parrish R. Kruger
District 2
*Joe Hutsell (R)
District 3
*John A. Schwartz (R)

STEUBEN

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Representative
District 51
*Tony Isa (R)
Judy Rowe (D)
District 52
*Ben Smaltz (R)
Joseph Trost (D)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
Shall Judge Dana J. Kenworthy be retained in office?
Fourth District
Shall Judge Mary A. DeBoer be retained in office?
Fifth District
Shall Judge Paul A. Felix be retained in office?
Indiana Tax Court
Shall Judge Justin L. McAdam be retained in office?

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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Shall inland casino gambling be permitted in Steuben County?

COUNTY

Superior Court
Judge
Travis B. Musser (R)
Prosecutor
Tracy R. Quinn (R)
Clerk
*Michelle (Shelley) Herbert (R)
Auditor
Alexis Huntley (D)
*Kelli Wilder Johnson (R)
Recorder
Linda S. Myers (R)
Sheriff
Christopher R.L. Emerick (R)
Surveyor
Colt L. Ridenour (R)
Assessor
*Kimberly K. Anderson (R)
Commissioner
District North
*Andy Laughlin (R)
Council
District 1
*Christina Cress (R)
District 2
*Eric M. Prall (R)
District 3
*Ruth (Hughes) Beer (R)
District 4
*Renee Carper (R)

CLEAR LAKE

Clerk-Treasurer
*Nathan Striker (R)
Council
At large
(Vote for 2)
Peter Disser (R)
*Molly Weber (R)

FREMONT

Council
At large
(Vote for 2)
Marcia Black (R)
Todd T. Johnson (R)
Lon N. Keyes (D)

HAMILTON

Council
District 1
Larry F. Bowers (D)
Richard (Rick) Long (R)

ORLAND

Clerk-treasurer
*April Christine Sanders (R)
Council
At large
(Vote for 3)
*Chris Sanders (R)
Zebulon Schuette (R)
*Robin Sears (R)

SCHOOLS

DeKalb Central
At large
Lauren Anderson (R)
Grant/Richland
Tim Haynes
Fremont
At large
*Abby K. Probst (R)
District 2
Benjamin J. Roederer
Travis Smoker (R)
District 3
*Andrew J. Lies
Andrea Vaughn
Hamilton
At large
*April Holden
District 1
*Brandy Shirley DePriest
District 3
Jamy Merritt
MSD Steuben
District 1
Michael Mike Wood (R)
District 2
*Thomas (Tom) O. Caswell, II
District 3
*Scott R. Poor
Prairie Heights
Milford
Steven M. Ceaglske (R)
Jordan R. Henschen (R)
William (Bill) Morr
Kenneth C. (Ken) Sheets (R)
Millgrove
Harmonee Laura McCrea (R)
*Jesslyn D. Senecal

WABASH COUNTY

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 2
Jamee Decio (D)
William Eric Henry (L)
*Rudy Yakym (R)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Senator
District 17
Chris Parker (R)
Cynthia M. Wehr (D)
Representative
District 22
*Craig Snow (R)
District 50
Pepper Snyder (D)
*Lorissa C. Sweet (R)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
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PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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Shall the Constitution of the State of Indiana be amended to permit the judge of a city or town court to reside

More ballots, Page 30

in: (1) the county in which the court is located; or (2) the bordering county closest to the city or town in which the court is located? (This question concerns Article 6, Section 6 of the Constitution of the State of Indiana.)

COUNTY

Superior Court
Judge
*Benjamin Daniel Robert Vanderpool (R)
Prosecutor
*William C. Hartley, Jr. (R)
Clerk
*Cheryl Evenson (R)
Recorder
Christine (Chrissy) Chamberlain (R)
Sheriff
J. Tyler Guenin (R)
Assessor
*Laci Stuber (R)
Commissioner
District 2
*Jeff Dawes (R)
Council
District 1
*Matthew J. Mize (R)
District 2
*Rhett Mast (R)
District 3
Daniel Cornett (D)
*Sam Hann (R)
District 4
*Kyle M. Bowman (R)
Tammari L. (Tammy) Ingalls (D)

SCHOOLS

Manchester
North Manchester
*Richard Espeset
MSD of Wabash
Northeast
*Matt Driscoll (R)
Northwest
*Jeff D. Porter (R)

WELLS

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Senator
District 19
Blake Fiechter (R)
Timothy C. Murphy (D)
Representative
District 50
Pepper L. Snyder (D)
*Lorissa C. Sweet (R)
District 79
*Matthew S. Lehman (R)
Ian G. Richardson (D)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
Shall Judge Dana J. Kenworthy be retained in office?
Fourth District
Shall Judge Mary A. DeBoer be retained in office?
Fifth District
Shall Judge Paul A. Felix be retained in office?
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COUNTY

Superior Court
Judge
*Andrew K. Antrim (R)
Prosecutor
*Colin Z. Andrews (R)
Sheriff
Chip Swindell (R)
Assessor
*Laura Roberts (R)
Auditor
Beth Davis (R)
Commissioner
District 1
*Mike Vanover (R)
Council
District 1
*Brian James Lambert (R)
District 2
*Steven R. Huggins (R)
District 3
*Todd J. Mahnensmith (R)
District 4
*Brandon Harnish (R)

SCHOOLS

Bluffton-Harrison
District 2
Mark Cobb
At large
(Vote for 2)
Ryan Schisler
*Julie A. Thompson (R)
Norwell
At large
Steve Garza (R)
Angela K. Topp (R)
Rockcreek
Chad L. Kline
Union
Jessica Bender
Southern Wells
Chester
*Andrew Pursifull
Liberty
Joe McFarren

WHITLEY

UNITED STATES

Representative
District 3
*Marlin A. Stutzman (R)
Kelly Thompson (D)

INDIANA

Secretary of state
Greg Ballard (LP)
Beau Bayh (D)
Max Engling (R)
Lauri A. Shillings (L)
Comptroller
Jessica Bailey (D)
*Elisa Nieshalla (R)
John Schick (L)
Treasurer
*Daniel Elliott (R)
Coumba Kebe (D)
Representative
District 18
*David H. Abbott (R)
District 83
Wesley Haffenden (D)
*Christopher Judy (R)

JUDICIAL RETENTION

Court of Appeals
Second District
Shall Judge Dana J. Kenworthy be retained in office?
Fourth District
Shall Judge Mary A. DeBoer be retained in office?
Fifth District
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COUNTY

Prosecutor
*Daniel J. (DJ) Sigler Jr. (R)
Clerk
*Jessica Hockemeyer (R)
Auditor
*Tiffany Deakins (R)
Recorder
April Whetsone (R)
Sheriff
*Jason Spencer (R)
Assessor
*Kimberly K. Erdly (R)
Commissioner
*Rob Schuman (R)
Tena Woenker
Council
District 1
Cindy (Auer) Doolittle (R)
District 2
Stephanie Pierce (D)
Damien Stafford (R)
District 3
*Nick Brewer (R)
District 4
Matt A. Gaff (R)

CHURUBUSCO

Council
(Vote for 2)
Gage Shively (R)
*Nathan Van Horn (R)

SCHOOLS

Smith Green
At large
(Vote for 2)
Marcus B Elam (I)
David Schafer (R)
*Kassie Taksey (R)
Whitley
Columbia City
(Vote for 2)
Katherine (Kate) Method (R)
Chris Miller (R)
Bryan Smethers (I)
Stephanie (Porter) Wilson (R)
Columbia
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Thorncreek
Angela Bauer (R)
Brook Meinika (R)
Whitko
District 4
*Deb Thomas (R)
District 5
*Scott Werstler (R)

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Voters asked to rewrite rules on bail

Proposed constitutional amendment on ballot

MACKENZI KLEMANN
Indiana Capital Chronicle

Indiana judges may soon have the ability to deny bail for more defendants they believe pose a danger to the public.

Defendants are guaranteed the right to bail under the Indiana constitution except in cases of murder or treason – even when a judge believes the defendant may reoffend while awaiting trial.

Hoosiers will vote this fall on a proposed constitutional amendment years in the making to rewrite these rules, so judges could deny bail to any defendant if the state proves they cannot be safely released.

Supporters say the amendment is needed to detain defendants who repeatedly commit violent crimes while on bail, while critics worry it jeopardizes due process rights for defendants who may spend months in jail without a conviction.

Two successive general assemblies approved the proposed amendment: in 2023 and 2026. Now it goes to the people on the Nov. 3 ballot.

The amendment

The amendment would preserve the right to bail for all offenses other than murder or treason – unless the defendant poses a "substantial risk to any other person or the community."

Those offenses would not be eligible for bail if "the proof is evident or the presumption strong" of their guilt.

The state would then need to prove "by clear and convincing evidence" no other release conditions would "reasonably" protect public safety.

Defendants are entitled to an attorney and a hearing if the state asks to deny them bail, as well as the right to appeal the court's decision.

A companion bill adopted this year directs courts to consider the evidence against the defendant and nature of the offense – did it involve drugs, alcohol or an act of violence?

Judges should consider the arrestee's character, health, family ties, employment, financial resources, community ties, criminal history and potential danger to the public.

Courts must also consider whether alternatives to pretrial detention are suitable.

Current process

Each county sets its own bail schedule to guide judges as they determine how much a defendant should pay to stay out of jail before trial.

Marion County Superior Court, for example, sets bail at $50,000 for serious felonies, though the defendant may pay far less through a licensed bail bondsman who pays the remaining balance so long as they attend their court hearings.

Murder is not eligible for bail, while defendants charged with misdemeanors or nonviolent felonies like marijuana possession are typically released on their own recognizance or without bail.

Aggravating factors like possession of a deadly weapon, inflicting serious bodily injury or a history of felony convictions may result in higher bail.

Bail schedules are advisory, with some counties opting for much higher amounts: In Elkhart County, the schedule calls for $150,000 bail for Level 1 felonies.

Judges can order a defendant back to jail if they're arrested again or violate the terms of release.

"The purpose of bail right now is to make sure people show up to court," said Mike Cunningham, a criminal defense attorney in Franklin who opposes the proposed amendment. "That's it. That's the purpose."

According to Cunningham, judges already have the discretion to order a defendant to wear an ankle monitor or not possess a firearm while on pretrial release, or set bail high enough to make sure defendants appear for their court hearings.

"We're in a system that works," he said.

Repeat offenders

Rearrest rates vary by county and release conditions.

The report found 32% of the 399 defendants released on bail in Allen County last year were rearrested while awaiting trial, while 24% of the 2,200 defendants released without bail were rearrested.

In Boone County, the rearrest rate was only 4% for the 1,183 defendants released on bail and 0.6% for those released on their own recognizance, though 20% of defendants released under unknown conditions were rearrested while awaiting trial last year.

Dearborn County claimed the lowest rearrest rate at 0.3%, with only 595 defendants released on bail.

An analysis of Indiana Office of Court Services data reviewed by the American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana, which opposes the amendment, found few of these defendants commit new violent crimes while awaiting trial.

Still, Becker said prosecutors became increasingly concerned about bail reforms adopted in recent years, which she said were applied inconsistently across the state, with some counties not prioritizing public safety in those decisions.

Evidence needed

While the amendment requires "clear and convincing evidence" a defendant is too dangerous for bail, how judges determine this standard could vary based on available evidence and their own judgment.

Prosecutors may present video, audio recordings or witnesses to the offense, but Becker said the most likely source of evidence will be the court record itself.

"We can articulate the person was under supervision or had a pending case or had other factors that had been imposed by a court," she said.

The defense would then have the chance to cross-examine witnesses, but Cunningham said attorneys often don't have access to much evidence from discovery at this stage.

He worries judges may accept weak evidence or that lawmakers may rewrite standards outlined in SEA 2, despite assurances from supporters who say everyone will follow their best judgment.

"When it's my job to make sure that the government is doing what they are required to do in black and white under the law, I don't know that it's going to be like that," Cunningham said.

"And if it's not, then what does that mean? Does that mean the government is really presenting the evidence necessary to meet their burden, or are they going to start cutting corners? Are judges going to start accepting the least bit of evidence? And then what do you have?

"You've got people sitting in jail based on what – not a whole lot."

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ALSO

A second public question will also be on your ballot. It would allow judges of city or town courts to live outside the jurisdiction.

The exact wording is: "Shall the Constitution of the State of Indiana be amended to permit the judge of a city or town court to reside in: (1) the county in which the court is located; or (2) the bordering county closest to the city or town in which the court is located?"

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